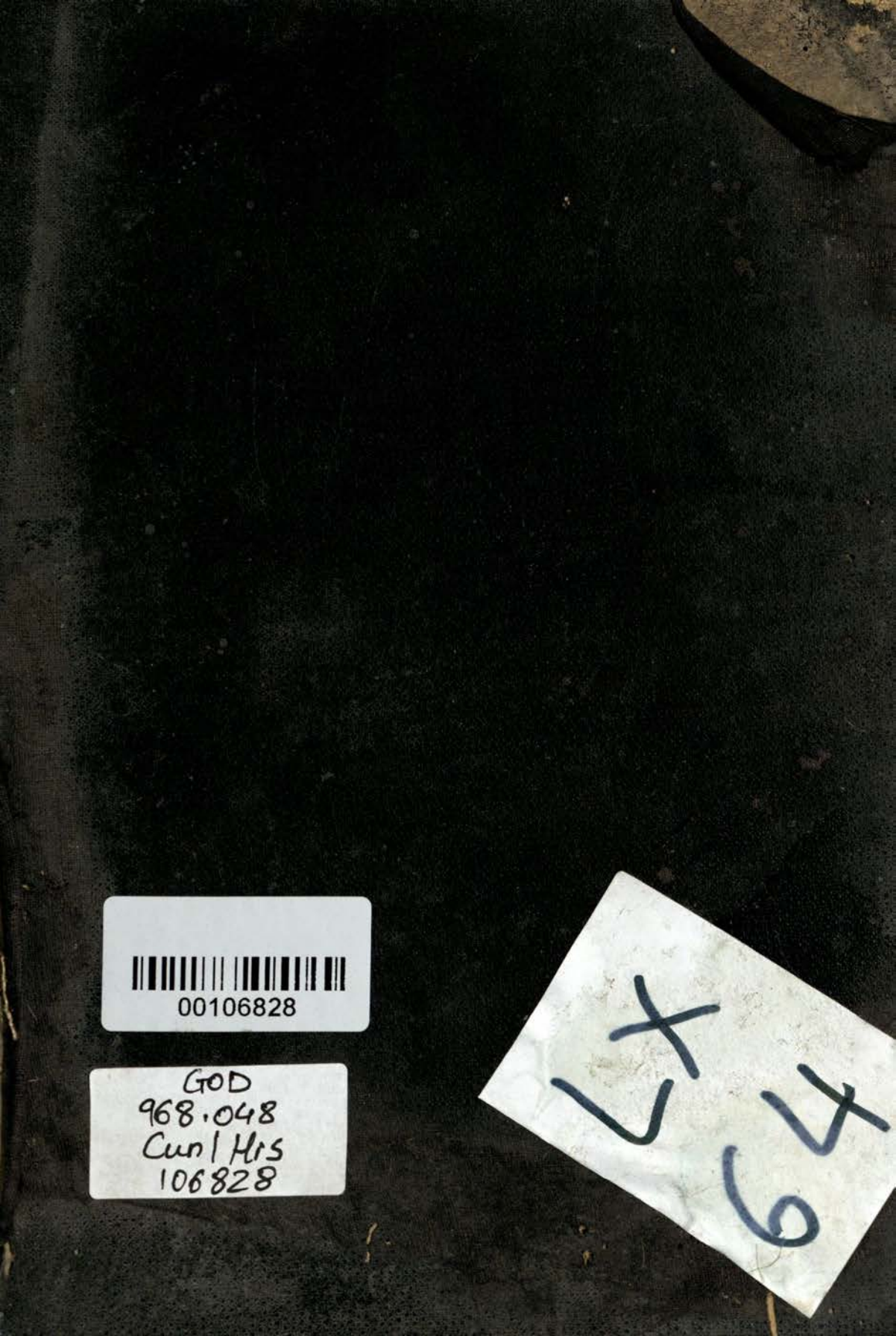
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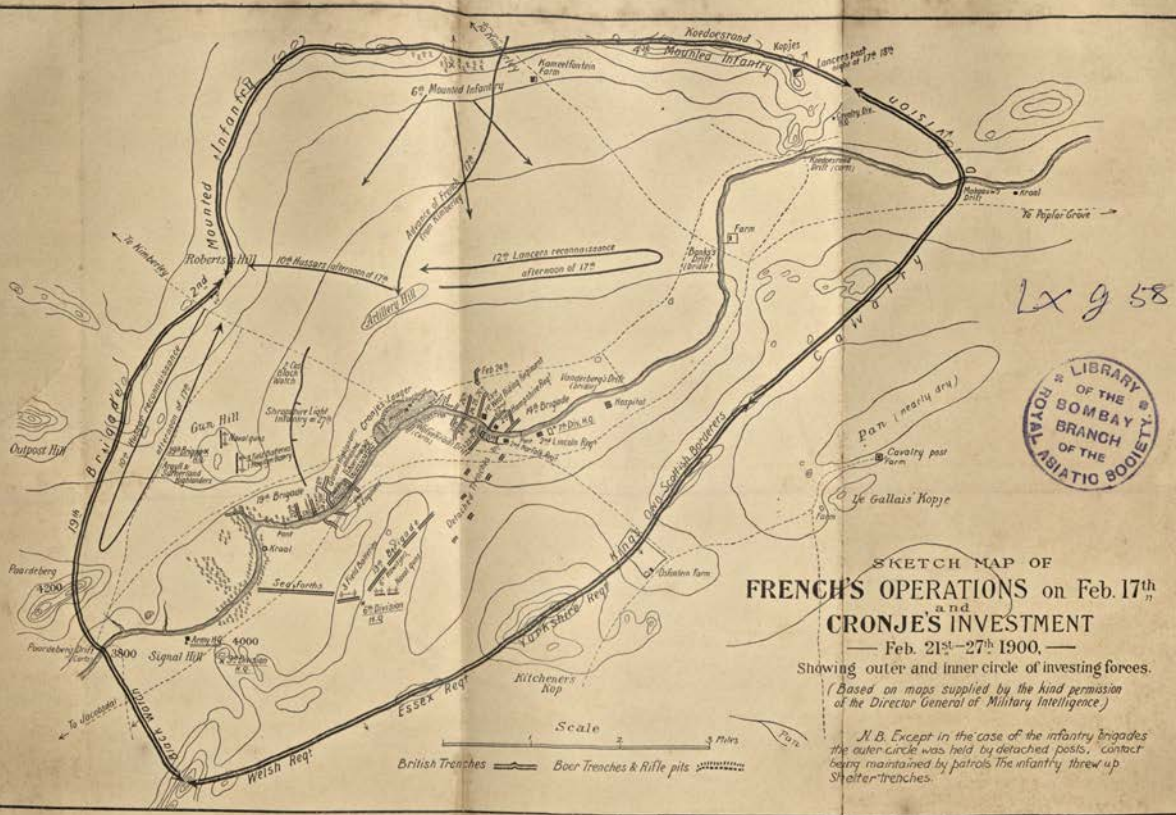

SKETCH MAP OF

FRENCH'S OPERATIONS on Feb. 17th and CRONJE'S INVESTMENT

— Feb. 21st–27th 1900, —

Showing outer and inner circle of investing forces.

(Based on maps supplied by the kind permission of the Director General of Military Intelligence.)

N.B. Except in the case of the infantry brigades the outer circle was held by detached posts, contact being maintained by patrols. The infantry threw up shelter trenches.

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[To face page 414.

THE HISTORY

OF

THE BOER WAR

TO THE OCCUPATION OF BLOEMFONTEIN

106828

BY

F. H. E. CUNLIFFE

FELLOW OF ALL SOULS' COLLEGE, OXFORD

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PREFACE

THE first part of this work contained an account of the field operations in Natal down to the relief of Ladysmith, and of the events in the western theatre of war as far as the middle of December, 1899. The present volume includes a narrative of the sieges of Ladysmith and Kimberley, of the operations round Colesberg, of the events on Modder River and north of Sterkstroom until the arrival of Lord Roberts, and of the campaign in the Free State up to the occupation of Bloemfontein. I have selected the last point as a suitable stopping-place; because, by establishing our military superiority, the march from the Modder ended the first period of the war and placed our armies on the road—albeit a long and difficult one—to final success. From that time onward the contest gradually changed its character: its main stream broke up into many smaller currents; and although the history of these, as presenting the complete development of our South African system, possesses an interest fully equal to any that appertains to the earlier portion of the struggle, the labour of tracing their endless deviations and counter eddies appears at present disproportioned to the profit that a single writer could derive from it. Limitation in point of the period covered was, however, not the only one to which I have been obliged to submit; and a few remarks are necessary as to the materials and method which have been employed in the compilation of the present volume.

After the first was completed it was decided to abandon the system of fortnightly instalments, and to publish the whole of the second in ordinary volume form. The reasons for this change were, to my thinking, perfectly adequate; but in view of the long delay

that has resulted, I feel that in justice to the subscribers to this history I must refer to them.

The two volumes were written under totally different conditions. The state of the South African War between January and October, 1900, during the period, that is, when the first was published, made first-hand information from the actors practically unobtainable; and I was consequently obliged to rely principally on the reports in the British and foreign Press and on such official documents as came to light from time to time. But towards the close of the year the situation of affairs seemed to warrant hopes of a speedy termination of hostilities; and I looked forward to the return of the army as an opportunity for the collection of more trustworthy materials. Messrs. Methuen and I agreed that the advantages of this would fully compensate for delay, and it was determined to postpone further publication until the whole volume was ready. Then came the set-back in the fortunes of the war. The hopes of an early peace were not realised; most of the eye-witnesses of the events with which the volume deals remained in South Africa; and it was not until the last months of 1902 that the bulk of the necessary information could be got together.

All this time the scope of the book was increasing. A flood of literature was being poured out upon the subject; a series of despatches and reports made constant revision and alteration unavoidable; and a large number of questions, the existence of which had at first gone unsuspected, were beginning gradually to assume their true proportions. This growth of material, which is largely accountable for the time that this volume has taken to prepare, has continued up to the present. I had hoped that it would have been published last October, but the mass of information contained in the evidence given before the War Commission and the recent appearance of the German Staff History necessitated fresh inquiries and entailed further delay. The result has been that every chapter has undergone frequent and extensive revision, and that several have had to be re-written three, or even more, times. I make these remarks, not for the purpose of exaggerating the labour of compilation, but in

order to explain why three and a half years have elapsed between the publication of the first volume and the second.

How far the result is satisfactory I must leave my readers to determine. I think I may truly affirm that there is contained in the present volume a good deal of material which has not seen the light before. That I am able to say this is entirely due to the courteous and willing assistance rendered by my many informants. I must ask them one and all to accept my most grateful thanks for the way in which they have met my requests, and for the pains they have expended on a task which was never easy, and in many cases very troublesome and unproductive. I have to express my especial indebtedness to the late Director of Military Intelligence for allowing me to reproduce official ground-plans of several of the fields of battle, for the loan of maps of the Orange Free State and Northern Cape Colony, and for permission to see the file of the Army Orders issued at various times by Lord Roberts. The question of maps has throughout been one of my chief difficulties; and without the kind assistance of the officials of the Intelligence Division it would have been very greatly aggravated. I may state here that only on one of the plans placed at my disposal—that of the lines of investment at Paardeberg, and on that only partially—were marked the positions of the troops. For the way in which they are indicated in the other sketches I alone am responsible.

To the information supplied by eye-witnesses I attribute any special historical value that this book may possess, but I need hardly remark that I have also endeavoured to make a full use of all the published material, official and non-official. Amongst the latter I am particularly indebted to the first and second volumes of the *Times* History and to the works of Messrs. Nevinson and Pearce in matters relating to the siege of Ladysmith. In writing the account of Lord Roberts's campaign I have derived substantial assistance from Mr. Goldmann's important book on the Cavalry, and, I must gratefully add, from the author himself. The appendices are mainly based upon the material unearthed by the War Commission. When its report appeared the whole of the first portion of the book was already in

its final form, but the information it contained appeared to me far too important to disregard, and I have therefore embodied its more salient points in the appendices, which should be read in conjunction with the chapters to which they relate. In some instances they will be found to modify, though not very materially, the opinions expressed in the text. With regard to the German Staff History, I had the satisfaction of finding that, so far as its facts were concerned, there was little substantial difference between it and my own account, but I have been able to benefit in several cases by its valuable criticisms; and in every case in which I have noticed a sensible discrepancy in matters of fact I have summarised the German version in a footnote.

Finally, I have to express my warmest thanks to the editor of the *Times* History and Mr. Lionel James for many most valuable suggestions and criticisms, and to Mr. S. T. Sheppard, of Trinity College, Oxford, for the industry and success with which he has collated a large part of the published materials.

A word may be said as to the main lines on which this volume has been written. It was clear from the first that anything approaching to completeness of view was out of the question. As long as staff diaries are regarded as secret documents; as long as orders, written on or off the field, are only obtainable in a few cases; as long as private opinions, diaries, and memoirs are for the most part inaccessible; any attempt to arrive at true historic proportion is bound to end in failure. Under such circumstances it is very hard to decide how much of the available information is to be excluded. It is equally certain that much that is important will in any case be omitted from sheer ignorance; and the difficulty is aggravated by the obvious fact that the higher the position of the informant the greater is the necessity for reserve. In the highest sense of the phrase a general history of the South African War cannot at the present time be written.

Therefore, while I have done all that lies in my power accurately to present the main tendencies of the campaign and the principal objects and influences which decided its course, I have not hesitated to narrate in detail many incidents which in the future may pass with a bare reference or may be wholly ignored. In a word, I have preferred inclusion

to exclusion as the safer course under the circumstances. I hope that this mode of treatment will not be altogether without its use. In the first place, it is often impossible to say what effect a chance skirmish, a sudden though harmless shell fire, a momentary glimpse of the enemy may have had on the mind of the General; nor is it fair, until that effect is known, to dismiss such incidents as unimportant because their results seem trifling. The appearance of a herd of blesbok has affected the disposition of a brigade of mounted infantry; the movements of a few Boer Scouts have imposed exhausting and useless marches upon large bodies of cavalry; and many other measures, the object of which is not at present obvious, may have been due to some similar cause. In the second place, many incidents, in themselves unimportant, were characteristic of the warfare in which our troops were engaged; and while they mark the dispersive tendencies of modern fighting help to explain why a force, imposing enough on paper, became ineffective for the main purpose of the operation. I have generally endeavoured, when there was sufficient material at my disposal, to note the position not merely of every battalion, regiment, or battery, but of every company, squadron and gun; and by a comparison of times and distances to account for and to emphasise the harassing "*longueurs*" and uncertainties which form so large a part of military operations. In adopting this method, I felt that, while it might expose me to the charge of want of concentration, its results might prove interesting to the professional reader and possibly be of some slight assistance to the future historian.

The nature and scope of my material has, of course, favoured this manner of description. Where complete information with regard to the higher command is lacking, the writer is obliged to fall back upon that afforded by eye-witnesses of the detail; and while these are not free from bias and cannot be interrogated like witnesses in a court of law, it is nevertheless possible with their help to establish with tolerable accuracy the framework of a fight, and approximately to fix the position of the different units on a particular day or at a particular moment. This method entails of course its peculiar disadvantages; for dependence on the evidence of subordinates may, quite unconsciously, prejudice

the judgment in reference to the higher leading, may exaggerate the achievements of one corps at the expense of others and may perhaps in some cases unnecessarily emphasise the sufferings and privations of the rank and file. I cannot hope that I have escaped the influence of these tendencies. I can only ask my readers to bear them in mind; and to believe that where their results are apparent the fault lies not with my informants but with my own lack of discrimination.

Working on the principle of inclusion as opposed to that of exclusion I have deliberately touched on several subjects on which information is greatly to seek, such as the exact effects of the loss of the convoy at Waterval, the question of co-operation between Sir George White and Sir Redvers Buller, and the immense and complicated problem of the routes of advance upon Bloemfontein. If I shall be thought to have fixed in any degree the data on which a judgment on these points must be based I shall be well satisfied.

One last word on the question of criticism, or as I prefer to call it, of comment. Such comment, whatever its scope, is absolutely unavoidable in history of any kind; but military history, from the very nature of the subjects and phenomena with which it deals and the strongly marked objectivity of war itself, probably presents more concrete cases for consideration than any other kind of chronicle. Often it is far more unjust to abstain from comment than to indulge in it. There is a good deal of comment scattered throughout this volume. I can honestly say that I have done my utmost to avoid captiousness; to elucidate rather than to censure; to see things from the standpoint of the actor as well as from that of the critic. It is quite possible that in some cases I have been too ready to acquit or to condone. If such a tendency is discernible I must be allowed to attribute it to the incompleteness and conflicting nature of the evidence, to the immense variety of points to be considered, and, above all, to a sense, appreciably quickened during the preparation of this volume, of the greatness of the difficulties which attend the study and practice of war.

F. H. E. C.

LONDON, *June*, 1904

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THE HISTORY OF
THE BOER WAR

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I

SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—PREPARATIONS

SITUATION OF WHITE ON OCTOBER 30TH—RESOLUTION TO DEFEND LADYSMITH—COULD WHITE HAVE KEPT OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH THE SOUTH?—WAS HE RIGHT IN RETAINING THE CAVALRY?—HIS FORCES—AMMUNITION SUPPLY—POSITION OF LADYSMITH—SHOULD WHITE HAVE HELD BULWANA?—BRITISH LINES—DISTRIBUTION OF TROOPS AND GUNS—FORTIFICATIONS—THE 2ND RIFLE BRIGADE—BOER POSITIONS—THEIR PLANS—THEIR GREAT FAULT—OCTOBER 30TH–NOVEMBER 6TH—BOMBARDMENT—ITS EFFECTS—INTOMBI CAMP FORMED—SPIES—DIFFICULTIES OF BRITISH INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENT

WHEN on the evening of October 30, 1899, Sir George White's weary and dispirited force fell back into Ladysmith, its commander found himself face to face with the first great crisis of the South African War. "The task before me," he wrote afterwards,[1] "was the protection from invasion by the Boers of as large a portion as possible of the Colony of Natal, and especially of Pietermaritzburg, the capital of that Colony and the seat of its Government; and I had to consider how this could be best insured." He had to choose between three alternatives. The first was to attack the enemy again—to resume, in short, field operations. The second was to remain at Ladysmith and allow himself to be invested. The third was to retire behind the Tugela and conduct the defence of Natal from some point south of the river.

The first alternative the English General rejected at once. . . . "The battle of Lombard's Kop (October 30th) had proved that the

[1] Despatch of March 23, 1900.

numbers and mobility of the Boer forces, when once concentrated, were too great to admit of any prospect of victory should I continue with inferior numbers to oppose them in the open field."

The reasons that governed his choice between the other two he states as follows :—" Ladysmith is the most important town in Northern Natal, and there was reason to believe that the enemy attached very great and perhaps undue importance to obtaining posses-

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR GEORGE S. WHITE, V.C., G.C.B., ETC.

sion of it. It was suspected then, and the suspicion has since been confirmed, that the occupation of that town by the Boer forces had been decided on by the disloyal Dutch in both Colonies as the signal for a general rising; as, in fact, a material guarantee that the power of the combined Republics was really capable of dealing with any force the British Empire was able to place in the field against them. Our

withdrawal would, therefore, have brought about an insurrection so widespread as to have very materially increased our difficulties."

So much for the political value of Ladysmith. "Strategically the town was important as being the junction of the railways which enter Natal from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and until the Republics could gain possession of that junction their necessarily divergent lines of supply and communication prevented their enjoying to the full the advantages of combined action. Tactically the place was already partially prepared for defence [1] and offered a natural position of some strength; and although the perimeter which had to be occupied was very great for the number of troops available, yet it afforded a possibility of maintaining a protracted defence against superior numbers. On the other hand, the mere fact of a retirement behind the Tugela would have had a moral effect at least equal to a serious defeat, and would have involved the abandonment to the enemy of a large town full of an English population of men, women, and children; and of a mass of stores and munitions of war which had been already collected there before my arrival in South Africa, and had since been increased. The line of the Tugela from the Drakensberg to the Buffalo River is some eighty miles [2] long, and in a dry season such as last November, can be crossed on foot almost everywhere. Against an enemy with more than double my numbers [3] and three times my mobility, I could not hope to maintain

[1] It would seem that the despatch gives too much prominence to these preparations. See the account of the defences given below, and also Appendix A

[2] The whole of this length was available, for the Boers were not only swifter of movement but better able to get over rough ground than British Columns. The Free State passes were also in their hands. When Sir Redvers Buller advanced to the attack of their positions, only about fifty miles of the river course, for the above stated reasons, was open to him.

[3] According to the *Times* History the number of Boers present in Natal was from 18,000 to 20,000 men. In the first few days of the siege this force was concentrated near the town, but after the operations on and south of the Tugela commenced the members of the investing army were constantly reduced, and in December it is very doubtful whether they amounted to 10,000 men. In January Baron von Malzan estimated the besiegers at 6,000, the covering force under Botha at 7,000, figures which are confirmed by the accounts of the Boers themselves as well as by those who inspected the sites of their laagers after the siege. At certain periods the investing force probably did not exceed 5,000. See Appendix C.

such a line with my small force, and any attempt to prevent their turning my flanks could only have resulted in such a weakening of my centre as would have led to its being pierced. Once my flank was turned on the line of the river the enemy would have been nearer Maritzburg than I should have been, and a rapid withdrawal by rail for the defence of the capital would have been inevitable. Even then it would have been impossible to make a prolonged defence without leaving it open to the enemy to occupy the important point of Durban, through which alone supplies and reinforcements could arrive, and for the defence of which another retreat would have become eventually essential; thus abandoning to the enemy the whole Colony of Natal from Laing's Nek to the sea. On the other hand, I was confident of holding out at Ladysmith as long as might be necessary, and I saw clearly that so long as I maintained myself there I could occupy the great mass of the Boer armies, and prevent them from sending more than small flying columns south of the Tugela, which the British and Colonial forces in my rear, aided by such reinforcements as might shortly be expected, could deal with without much difficulty. Accordingly, I turned my whole attention to preparing Ladysmith to stand a prolonged siege."

Such was Sir George White's statement of the reasons which induced him to remain at Ladysmith, a summary, it is not unfair to remember, written after the siege. His decision was severely censured in the light of after events, when the checks experienced on the Tugela directed undue attention to the difficulties which his choice imposed upon the Relief Column, and tended to minimise the importance of the considerations upon which that choice was based. The *Times* History,[1] in a very temperate summary of the situation, has criticised him on the ground that, by permitting himself to be invested, he wrecked the original plan of campaign, and that he could have avoided this by retiring to some such line as the Mooi River, where he might have maintained himself and awaited events. White's action certainly forced the hand of his superior. The limited amount of supplies in Ladysmith,

[1] Vol. ii., pp. 261, *et seq.* See Appendix A.

and the importance of its garrison, coupled with the certainty that Southern Natal, if left undefended, would be overrun, compelled Sir Redvers Buller to attempt the early relief of the town with the greater part of his force. On the other hand, if Sir George White had fallen back across the Tugela, he could always, had he found himself unable to defend the Colony, have retreated to Durban without Buller's assistance. But such a retreat would have been only less disastrous than the surrender which Buller changed his plan of campaign to avert. The justice of the view taken by the *Times* History depends upon whether, if White had attempted the defence of Southern Natal, he could have maintained himself without strong reinforcements. If he could have done so, then Buller could have carried out his original plan of advance into the Free State; if not, then the force in Cape Colony would have been too weak to act decisively, and the prearranged scheme would have been wrecked as completely as if White had remained at Ladysmith. As the same work points out, only a general of great confidence in himself and his troops would have abandoned Ladysmith and retired southwards to cover Pietermaritzburg until Buller's movement into the Free State had taken effect. It is true that at the beginning of the war the Boers as a body lacked initiative, and the organisation that is necessary for long and rapid movements. In Joubert, moreover, they possessed a leader who was quite unequal to his position. But their recent victories, crowned by the capture of Ladysmith and its stores, the opportunity of descending into the long-coveted "garden of South Africa," and the avowed friendliness of part of the population, would, we think, have imparted an uncontrollable impulsion to their commandos and carried with them, as a like wave of popular sentiment had done at Zandspruit, the leader who had then hesitated to invade Natal. The success of the operations of General French at Colesberg certainly prompts a lower estimate of Boer initiative than that with which we credited them at the commencement of the war, but it should be remembered that the forward impetus in Natal was far greater than that which inspired the enemy's forces in Cape Colony; in fact, it is not too much to say that in Natal the Boers contemplated and

executed a real strategic offensive,[1] whereas along the Orange River they never made any attempt at a combined advance. To check such a movement with the Natal Field Force alone would have sorely taxed the capacity of a very vigorous commander, and the risk of failure was great. The mere occupation of a position such as the Mooi River would not have been sufficient. Sir George White would have had to adopt an offensive attitude, such as General French maintained to the south of Colesberg, and in Natal one of the essentials of success in this form of warfare, superior mobility, was not only wanting, but actually in the possession of the enemy. We greatly doubt whether the general and the army which had been beaten at Lombard's Kop would, at the moment at any rate, have been able to carry a fresh campaign to a successful issue; whether, in other words, the difference of terrain between Northern and Southern Natal could have made up for the loss of confidence and the want of skill, speed, and energy which the collision north of the Tugela had made apparent. If this view be correct White could not have defended Southern Natal unsupported, and whether he had remained at Ladysmith or retreated over the Tugela Buller would have been obliged to send him reinforcements so large as to render the march on Bloemfontein impracticable.

At the moment the situation may well have appeared in yet darker colours. Sir George White believed the enemy to be more than twice as numerous as his own troops; he knew them to be far more mobile; he had seen his cavalry fail through inaction, his infantry retire in confusion from a badly developed attack. The campaign was not a fortnight old, and the quick succession of events had prevented him from perceiving the weaknesses of the Boer system. Labouring under the sense of unexpected defeat, it was not wonderful that he despaired of the practicability of further field operations in a wide theatre of war against a foe which had outnumbered and outfought him, and that he preferred to make a stand with all his troops at Ladysmith, where he might fairly hope to keep a large part of the Boers employed, and where

[1] The feebleness of Joubert's advance to the Mooi River may be quoted in contradiction of this view, but the presence of White in Ladysmith made the case essentially different from that which we are discussing.

his resistance would still proclaim the unchanged resolution of the Empire.

It was a choice of evils, and Sir George chose the lesser. His main hopes—he had too little freedom of choice to justify us in calling them calculations—were, indeed, fulfilled. His presence in Ladysmith certainly held fast the bulk of the enemy as long as was necessary; and Joubert's invasion of Southern Natal was, in a military sense, a complete failure. During the first half of November, while the Colony was almost defenceless,[1] he did nothing, and when he did at last cross the Tugela it was too late. The small force at Estcourt, which a week before would have been incapable of resisting the attack of 6,000 men, had been reinforced, and with the fight of Willow Grange the Boer inroad came to a hasty conclusion. Sir George may reasonably claim that for the necessary fortnight he kept the enemy north of the Tugela.[2] Yet the fact that Maritzburg was only saved by a few hours showed also the inherent weakness of his position, and the narrowness of the margin of safety. But the main responsibility for the peril to which Natal was exposed does not rest with the commander of the Natal Field Force. The "unhappy entanglement" of Ladysmith was principally due to underestimation of the enemy's strength, and to the great distance of England, the British base of supply and reinforcements, from South Africa. Hence it arose that at the end of a fortnight's hostilities the strongest British force on the continent found itself face to face with the humiliating alternative of abandoning the territory it was intended to defend, or of submitting to a siege; and that in a position not specially suited for defence nor prepared for it as fully as it should have been.

[1] Major-General Hildyard and the West Yorkshire Regiment did not reach Durban until November 11th; the Naval Brigade detached for its defence arrived two days later. By November 16th the greater part of Hildyard's Brigade had reached Estcourt, and the Colonial Corps had become an important factor.

[2] As early as October 28th he telegraphed that Natal required "earliest reinforcements possible." On the 31st Buller replied that no reinforcements could reach him "for at least 14 days." On November 11th the latter begins a telegram to Lansdowne with the words "The advance of the enemy seems to have been so thoroughly checked by the defence of Ladysmith . . ."

There was indeed an unquestionable want of foresight in not providing Ladysmith earlier with defences which at least would have rendered it impervious to a *coup de main* while the main force was absent. No such precautions had been taken before the war commenced, although for two and a half years the town had been regularly garrisoned and regarded as our principal base in Northern Natal. It is still less easy to understand why, during the time of Sir George White's arrival and the advance of the Boer forces, some adequate preparation was not made to ensure the security of the town and stores, and so to augment the army's power of manœuvring. The plea that political considerations prevented this is, like that advanced in defence of the retention of Symons' force at Dundee, totally inadequate. Sir George White, in common with others, had recognised the possibility of his isolation, if not of his close investment. As early as October 20th a field order mentions the defences of the "advanced depôt of Ladysmith" as being organised in two sections east and west of the Pietermaritzburg-Harrismith railway, although very little seems to have been done to render the positions secure against attack, and at best they only covered the north and north-west fronts of the town. The outline scheme of defence had been drawn up on the 16th; on the 25th the demand for naval guns[1] reached Admiral Harris at Simonstown. All this time, Colonel Ward was hurrying up great masses of supplies from Durban. Everything therefore goes to show that three weeks before Lombard's Kop Sir George White regarded Ladysmith as his base and final *point d'appui*, and it is consequently surprising that the Headquarters Staff did not take steps to put the town in a good state of defence before October 30th. The partial preparations referred to in Sir George White's despatch were in no sense calculated to ensure the safety of the garrison.[2] Had the enemy acted with speed and energy, the garrison might have had bitter reason to repent of the oversight.

[1] Then regarded purely as guns of position.

[2] It is only fair to say that the appearance of the Boer siege-guns necessitated the alteration and enlargement of the perimeter it was at first intended to hold. See Appendix A 2 for a discussion of the reasons of the omission to make complete preparations.

For the Headquarters Staff the night of October 30th must have been sufficiently trying. The events of the day and the decision to submit to a siege necessitated new measures of all kinds, all of which had to be carried out rapidly by tired and in some cases disheartened men. By the morning, however, the work of defence and reorganisation was in progress, the Manchesters were occupying Cæsar's Camp, and along the whole perimeter of the defences all hands were engaged in trench-making and sangár-building. What Sir George White's views on the preceding evening exactly were it is impossible to say. In the opinion of many in Ladysmith he yielded too easily to the pressure of the investing forces. According to some of his critics he should have sent the cavalry out of Ladysmith to keep open the communication between the town and the Colenso bridges. One eye-witness was of the opinion that, if the cavalry had been vigorously used in the first days of November, it would have been possible to keep open communication with the South until the arrival of Hildyard. Considering the smallness of the force then mustering about Estcourt, the belief that 2,000 mounted men [1] could keep 150 square miles of most difficult country clear of a much more numerous enemy for at least a fortnight certainly argues a supreme faith in the latter's timidity and the former's endurance. If the cavalry had been more vigorously handled and our intelligence department had shown greater efficiency, it is likely that the completion of the investment might for a day or two have been delayed. But unless Sir George White's judgment grossly erred, the superior number of his opponents and the nature of the country placed any permanent advantages in the open field out of the question. Making every allowance for the slowness and cautiousness of the enemy, it is not easy to believe that White's mounted men, most of whom were regular cavalry armed with carbines and inexperienced in mountain warfare, could by sudden raids and attacks on isolated laagers have defended his communications, even as far as Colenso, for any considerable length of time. To do this the cavalry would have had to engage in a conflict in which every advantage was on the side of the Boers, and even uniform tactical success would have been counterbalanced by increasing

[1] Including all the mounted troops in Ladysmith.

physical exhaustion. The danger of isolation and capture, the difficulties of supply and the shortness of the available time forbade the occupation of permanent posts by infantry as bases for cavalry action. The only attempt of the kind was a failure. On October 31st the Dublin Fusiliers and the Natal Field Battery were despatched to Colenso "to assist in defending the bridges over the Tugela."[1] On the night of November 3rd they had to retreat to avoid capture. To hold the passes over the Grobler Range or the river would certainly have required a brigade of infantry, and a powerful detachment of artillery, as well as the mounted troops. So large a detachment White could not afford to make. The unfortunate issue of Lombard's Kop had once and for all decided whether the initiative was to fall to the British or the Boers.

Whether Sir George should have kept the cavalry in Ladysmith at all is another question, and one regarding which there seems to be very great divergence of opinion.[1] Sir George's critics maintain that if he had sent the cavalry away it would have prevented any Boer raid south of the Tugela and greatly strengthened Sir Redvers Buller; that the Natal Volunteers, 1,000 strong, who were with the Natal Field Force in Ladysmith, would have amply sufficed for the performance of any ordinary mounted duties, and that Sir George White's conduct of the defences offers no reason for supposing that he ever contemplated extensive cavalry action. It is further argued that the reason assigned for the retention of the cavalry, viz., that without their aid the extensive perimeter of the defences could not have been held, does not hold good, since, during the greater part of the siege, they did hardly any work in the trenches, but were simply regarded as a mobile reserve; and that even towards the end, when disease and wounds had sorely thinned the ranks of the infantry, the assistance they rendered could have safely been dispensed with, or better supplied by arming the non-combatants (as was actually done in January) and the civilians.

These contentions naturally fall into two groups, according as they relate to the defensive or offensive employment of the mounted force. The argument that the cavalry were not indispensable to the safety of the town in February is based upon suppositions which the Boers

[1] See Appendix B.

never put to a practical test, and is probably one on which there will always be a difference of judgment. The exact effective strengths of the various corps in the final weeks of the siege are not yet published, so that the comparative amount of assistance rendered by the dismounted cavalrymen cannot, even in point of numbers, be accurately stated. Seeing that portions of the defences were definitely handed over to them, it is fair to conclude that the relief they afforded in the matter of daily work was appreciable. To say, however, that the infantry's powers of endurance would without them have been strained to breaking point, and that the scales of danger and safety were turned by the presence of a few hundreds of dismounted cavalrymen, is to argue from insufficient premises. So far, indeed, as the correctness of Sir George White's judgment is concerned, these considerations are of little or no importance, for he could scarcely have foreseen, when he elected to retain the cavalry, the condition to which his garrison would finally be reduced. Like most other people, he probably expected relief about Christmas-time.

His real reason for the retention of the calvary was its value, not as a dismounted force in the trenches, but as a mobile reserve in the centre. There is little doubt that in the first days after Lombard's Kop the British General took an exaggerated view of the mobility, strength and vigour of his opponents. He was very unwilling to weaken his available force, and above all the mounted arm, which partly explains the ineffective measure of sending the Dublins to Colenso.[1] Probably he expected to be heavily attacked at an early date, and perhaps to be involved in very hard and continuous fighting along the whole perimeter of his defences, in which case as powerful and mobile a reserve as possible might have been needed to reinforce or to relieve temporarily exhausted troops. The events of January 6th, while they do not seem absolutely to justify his contention that the cavalry saved the situation, certainly go far to prove that his conviction of the necessity of such a reserve had, as General Buller admitted, a basis of fact.[2]

[1] See Appendix B.

[2] See Question 15,162, Vol. II., Evidence.

So little were the cavalry used in their true sphere that there is a tendency to regard their presence in Ladysmith purely in the light of the aid they could render as a defensive arm. Yet at least as strong a justification for their retention lies in the possibilities of a vigorous offensive, which they alone rendered feasible. It is not maintained that their powers in this direction were as fully developed as they should have been. Although Sir George White was right in not attempting any offensive operations on a large scale, yet under a more capable commander and with more energetic support from himself, the cavalry regiments might, without undue risk, have done much more in the way of harassing the enemy and destroying his supplies. But, in co-operation with the Relief Column the British General may well have expected to do great things with his cavalry.[1] Without them his power of assisting Buller would have been considerably crippled; with them he was in the best of all positions for turning the defeat of the enemy into a veritable disaster. Had Pieter's Hill been fought two months earlier, the effects of their action on the enemy's line of retreat should have been terrible. The possibility of some such decisive operation on the Boer rear, and the knowledge that to send away the cavalry was to proclaim beforehand to the enemy the passive nature of his intended defence, were better reasons for their retention than any purely defensive power he may have hoped to derive from them.

On the other hand we know that Generals French and Hunter both urged their commander to send the cavalry away, and that their opinions, of great weight in themselves, are on the whole supported by the event. The great opportunity never came. The cavalry were incapacitated for vigorous action; and in the meantime their horses consumed an enormous amount of food which might have been eaten by the men, while their presence operated unfavourably upon the sanitary condition of the town. Probably Sir George White would have done better in sending away a part of Brocklehurst's Brigade and in retaining the Dublins, who on the lines of defence were worth three cavalry regiments. He would by so acting still have had a small reserve in hand in case of need. At the same time we cannot blame

[1] See his message of November 30th to Buller, p. 44; also Appendix C.

him. Under the circumstances he was entitled to take precautions to meet just the opposite of what actually occurred, that is say, instead of a long investment with comparatively little fighting, a comparatively short one marked by a number of sharp attacks. Thus, it seems to us, he judged, and so judging, his first thought was for the safety of his force. Conscious of the wide perimeter he had to hold, and aware of the strength and numbers of his enemy, he had no mind to weaken his garrison.

The situation on the night of October 30th was extraordinarily favourable to the Boers. In Ladysmith reigned confusion, depression, uncertainty; the troops were exhausted, the defences were inadequate, and Cæsar's Camp, Waggon Hill, and Red Hill were unoccupied. The civil population was in a state bordering on panic, and the town teemed with spies. Had Joubert acted with vigour, seized Cæsar's Camp, and pressed a general attack next day, the position of the British army would have been most critical. The peculiar character of the Boer army, its general's failing powers, and possibly a misappreciation of the state of affairs, can alone have accounted for the failure to use these momentary advantages which obtained, though in a much lesser degree, during the succeeding days. This neglect, whether due to over-confidence, or over-caution, or a characteristic mixture of both, deprived the Boer army of the best chance it ever had of taking Ladysmith.[1]

As we have already given some account[2] of the cavalry operations

[1] The above opinion seems to be justified by the evidence given by Sir Archibald Hunter and Sir Ian Hamilton; and the fact that these two distinguished soldiers attribute the seriousness of the situation to different causes rather strengthens than diminishes the reader's conviction as to the main fact. Sir Ian Hamilton, whose brigade covered the retreat from Lombard's Kop, and who was perhaps in the best position to realise the condition of the troops during the afternoon of October 30th, says: "We returned to Ladysmith in a state in which a large number of the troops were discouraged, and in which for a day or two we had lost the power of any vigorous initiative. . . . If the Boers had really pressed, if they had had some disciplined body to which they could have given the order to vigorously attack and pursue, I think it might have been a bad business" (13,867–70). General Hunter, while he did not notice any signs of demoralisation, says: "I will tell you where it would have gone hard: that the defences of Ladysmith at that time were not in the condition of perfection that they reached afterwards," and he admits that, had the Boers acted on the principle that it was worth while incurring a certain loss in order to gain a definite position, they would have got in (14,541–2, 14,561).

[2] Vol. i.

of November 2nd and 3rd, we shall come at once to the preparation for the siege and the various resources at the disposal of the British General. The following is a list of the various units under his command, together with a rough estimate of the strength of the different arms :—

Cavalry—				
5th Lancers	11 squadrons		Sabres 1,200	
5th Dragoon Guards				
18th Hussars				
19th Hussars				
Infantry—				
1st Devonshire Regiment ...	equal to about 9 battalions		Bayonets 6,500[1]	
1st Manchester Regiment ...				
2nd Gordon Highlanders ...				
1st Leicester Regiment				
1st King's Royal Rifle Corps ...				
2nd King's Royal Rifle Corps ...				
2nd Rifle Brigade				
1st Liverpool Regiment ...				
1st Gloucester Regiment (less than half a battalion) ...				
1st Royal Irish Rifles (about 3 companies)				
Royal Field Artillery—				Artillerymen 1,210
13th, 21st, 42nd, 53rd, 67th, 69th batteries	36 guns		900 men	
	2 6·3″ M. L. Howitzers ...			
Naval Brigade	2 4·7 guns		280 men	
	3 long 12-pounders ...			
	1 12-pound field gun ...			
Mountain Battery, No. 10, one section	2 guns		30 men	
Colonial Troops—				1,307
Imperial Light Horse	... ...		300	
Natal Mounted Rifles	... ...		201	
Natal Carbineers	... ...		387	
Border Mounted Rifles	... ...		258	
Natal Police	... ...		64	
Natal Naval Volunteers	1 9-pounder ...		78	
	1 Hotchkiss ...			
Natal F. A. Hotchkiss detachment	1 Hotchkiss		19	
	49 guns		Men ...	10,217

Five hundred and seventy-two officers, the 23rd Field Company Royal Engineers, the Telegraph and Balloon Detachments, the Army Service Corps, and No. 4 Company of the Army Ordnance Department,

[1] The *Times* correspondent estimated the infantry at 5,000 odd. Seeing, however, that the total losses of all arms up to November 1st had amounted only to 1,955 rank and file, and that the infantry battalions at the commencement must have averaged 850 bayonets a-piece, this figure appears too low. There was little sickness at this time.

together with the non-combatants, brought the force up to a grand total of over 12,000 men.

Besides the troops, there were in Ladysmith 750 Cape-boys belonging to the transport, 2,440 Kaffirs, many of them employed by the military authorities, 2,470 Indians and about 3,000 Europeans, 150 being children under ten years of age. In all, therefore, the combatants and non-combatants amounted to about 21,000 souls.

To the question of food we need not here refer in detail, for during the first weeks of the siege the whole of the population had plenty to eat, the military stores amounting to eighty days' full rations for 10,000 men, and large quantities of provisions and 1,511 slaughter cattle being obtained by requisition from the town. The supply of shell was, however, perilously small. On November 1st there remained less than 300 shrapnel per field gun. The Naval ordnance was hardly better provided for, and after the first weeks of the siege rarely fired unless in replying to the enemy's artillery or when some special end was to be served. This want of ammunition must be taken into consideration when judgment is passed on the strictly defensive attitude maintained by Sir George White, who was bound to husband his supply for emergencies, and knew that two serious engagements would nearly exhaust it. Of rifle ammunition there was fortunately an ample store.[1]

The position which Sir George White's force had to defend was of great extent and complexity. The town of Ladysmith, extending north-east and south-west, was situate in a deep bend of the Klip river, which practically encompassed it on the western and eastern fronts. From north-west to north-east the circle was completed by a ring of low kopjes from one to two hundred feet in height, which formed the northern section of the British defences. The town itself consisted of low-roofed houses surrounded by gardens and trees. The length of the main mass of buildings was about a mile and a half, the breadth half a mile. Across its north-eastern angle passed the Newcastle railway.

[1] In his message of November 30th, Sir George White states that he has provisions for 70 days, forage at reduced rations for 35 days, 5½ million rounds of small-arm ammunition, 250 rounds per field gun, 170 rounds per 4·7 gun, 270 rounds per Naval 12-pounder, and 430 rounds per 6·3″ howitzer.

Due east of the town, in the great curve of the river, was a flat, 3,000 yards across, through which the railway ran south-east towards Nelthorpe, seven miles distant. As far as Intombi Spruit, about 6,500 yards from the Ladysmith railway bridge, the Klip wound in broad bends through a tolerably level and open country, bounded on the east by the steep and commanding height of Bulwana, which directly faced the long front of the town at about 8,000 yards distance. South of the Intombi Spruit the river and railway plunged into the hills about Herman's Spruit and Willis's Farm.

West of the river and about 3,000 yards south of the town rose the long ridge of Cæsar's Camp, called by the Boers the Platrand, and locally known as Bester's Ridge. It ran east and west, and measured about 5,000 yards in length, throwing out towards the town a spur known as Maiden Castle. In the Fouries Spruit Valley south of the main ridge lay Bester's Farm, and to the south-west, within 2,000 yards of Waggon Hill, its western extremity, were Mounted Infantry Hill[1] and, further to the south, Middle Hill and End Hill.

Due west of Waggon Hill, at a distance of 5,000 to 6,000 yards lay the long flat hill called Rifleman's Ridge. South of it was Lancer's Hill, and over Lancer's Nek, between the two, ran the roads to Acton Homes and Potgieter's Drifts. Between these ridges and the mass of Cæsar's Camp stretched the Long Valley through which Bester's Spruit ran northward to join the Klip. A rugged line of kopjes, known as Highlanders Post and Range Post, closed the gap between Maiden Castle and the river junction. North of Bester's Spruit a confused mass of hill looked westwards on to the Great Plain, the kopje called Rifleman's Post lying in the angle between the streams, Star Hill about 2,000 yards to the westward, and the Niblick kopjes and Drift Hill about the same distance to the north-eastward. Skirting the Great Plain on the north the Sand River ran eastward to its junction with the Klip, bounded on its northern bank by the long ridge of Telegraph Hill, the eastern extremity of which was within 6,000 yards of the Old Camp and 5,000 yards of Rifleman's Post.

On the left bank of the Klip, north-west of the town and close to

[1] Apparently so called from the skirmish which had taken place on its slopes.

the Free State railway bridge Railway Kopje, Thornhill's Kopje, Surprise Hill, and Bell's Kopje ran in a rough line from west to east, fronting Ration Post, King's Post, Leicester Post, Cove Redoubt, Observation Hill, and Gordon Hill, at distances varying from 3,000 to 4,000 yards, the intervening valley being marked by the railway line. Almost due north of the town, east of Bell's Spruit, loomed the great mass of Pepworth rising into the more distant height of Intintanyone, the summit of the former being within 7,000 yards of the kopjes north of Ladysmith, viz., Junction and Tunnel Hill on either side the line, and Helpmakaar or Factory Hills further to the east. North-east of the last lay the scene of the Farquhar's Farm engagement; and 4,000 yards due east rose the rugged pile of Lombard's Kop, between which and Bulwana ran the road to Helpmakaar. Between these two latter heights and Ladysmith the flat expanse round the river banks offered no dominant point. It was out of this tangle of twisted and broken country, in some parts thickly covered with thorn-bush or mealies, in others offering a scanty pasture, or strewn with boulders, that the British Staff had to choose a series of positions, which, while forbidding the Boers access to any vantage ground from which the life of the garrison could be seriously endangered, should not be too extended for the troops available for their defence. As the enemy possessed long-range artillery it was clear that the town could not escape a bombardment; it remained only to hold such positions as would ensure a comparative security and a power of continued resistance of the defenders.

It has been maintained that Sir George White made a great mistake in not including Bulwana in his system of defence. The fact, however, appears to be that the prominent part played by this hill in the siege has gained it an importance out of all proportion to its tactical value. Its retention would unquestionably have deprived the Boers of their best gun position, although they would still have been able effectively to bombard the town and lines from Pepworth Hill, Surprise Hill, Telegraph and Rifleman's Ridges, and from the hills south and south-west of Cæsar's Camp. By occupying it the British would have gained a far larger grazing ground for the horses, more space for the population of the town to move in, a secure resting-

place for the hospitals, and an excellent covering position for offensive operations towards Pieter's Station. But to hold the great ridge securely would have required a large permanent garrison provided with guns, and after Nicholson's Nek White could not spare the men. The summit of Bulwana is nearly five miles distant from Ladysmith; and a force on its summit would have found itself isolated, a very steep and rugged slope in its rear, its left flank liable to attack and enfilade from Lombard's Kop, its right resting on the broken slopes which, intersected with dongas and covered with bush, invite an attack from Intombi. The flat top was about 3,000 yards long, and the space between its south-western extremity and the gorge of the Klip below Intombi Hill was of about the same width. To have secured the right flank, this low ground, like the space between Cæsar's Camp and the river, must have been occupied; the left flank could not have been made safe without garrisoning Lombard's Kop, some 3,000 yards to the northward. Thus, to ensure the safety of the troops on Bulwana, some 9,000 yards of front would have had to be held, and that at distances varying from three to five miles of Ladysmith. The defence of such a line would have required at least three battalions and one or two batteries. Had White still possessed as many troops as had fought at Lombard's Kop and Nicholson's Nek, he might have occupied the great eastern chain of hills with some chance of being able to hold them. As it was, with over a thousand men lost and the Dublins gone, he could not attempt it. To have held Bulwana alone would have been to invite a converging attack from north, east and south, and to run the risk of losing a large number of men in the defence of the hill, or in the act of abandoning it. The steep ground on the western side was impracticable for guns, and if the other troops were driven down, the artillery on the summit would almost inevitably have been captured. By relinquishing Bulwana he exposed the town and garrison to considerable suffering and added privations; but he avoided the risks of undue extension, was enabled to hold in some strength much more vital points, and to occupy on his eastern flank a line of defence which the enemy never dared to attack.

Seeing that, far from the possibility of retaking Pepworth, he had

not enough troops to occupy Bulwana, Sir George White had withdrawn from the latter on the evening of the 30th, and trusting to the broad intervening plain for protection on the east from everything but long-range fire, set himself to fortify the necessary positions on the north, west and south. On the north the well-marked line of kopjes already referred to, stretching from Helpmakaar Hill to Cove Redoubt, had been occupied on the night of the 30th. On the 31st a company of the Manchesters were on Range Post, and the rest of the regiment on Cæsar's Camp. Observation Hill was occupied on the same day by a cavalry outpost. The fourth or eastern side was not guarded by infantry, but treated as an outpost line, the pickets being supported by the troops encamped under the river banks.

At the commencement of the siege the defences were divided into four sections, known as A, B, C and D, under the command of Colonel Knox, Major-General Howard, Colonel Ian Hamilton, and Colonel Royston. A certain proportion of troops of all arms were allotted to each, and generally speaking the different units kept the same places throughout. After Colenso a fresh disposition seems to have been made, and at various periods during the investment certain parts of the line, notably Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill, were reinforced as circumstances required; but the broad features of the scheme remained the same.

Section A embraced a large portion of the northern front, and included the positions from Helpmakaar or Devon Hill to Cove Redoubt. Beginning on the north-east front, at the extreme right horn of the crescent, the 1st Devonshire Regiment, who had covered the retreat from Farquhar's Farm, took post on the hill named after them. Major Park held a position of about 1,000 yards in length, on a ridge from 150 to 200 feet high. Some distance to his northern front were half of the 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps and the remnant of the Gloucester Regiment. The field of fire in this direction was fairly clear, and on November 12th, by destroying a farm three-quarters of a mile from their rank flank, the Devonshire Regiment deprived the enemy's sharpshooters of a useful *point d'appui*. Their camp was pitched between the hill and the river; but as the tents drew the enemy's fire, they had always to be struck before daylight. The

trenches, store pits, and iron and stone shelters for the men were built with great rapidity and thoroughness, the whole of this section of the defences being almost shell-proof by the 5th of November. With the Devons were two 12-pounder quick-firing Maxim-Nordenfeldts, taken at Elandslaagte,[1] and the 13th Field Battery, which had gun-pits near the railway cutting through Tunnel Hill.

Next to the Devons a few Gloucesters held the post on Cemetery Hill, and next to them were half a battalion of the Liverpool Regiment on Tunnel Hill. On Junction Hill was placed the 4·7 gun known as "Lady Anne," its front being guarded by two companies of Liverpools. On Gordon Hill, half a mile south-west of Junction Hill, was the main station of the Naval Brigade. Here during the early part of the siege were the four 12-pounders and the four Naval Maxims; and behind the ridge was the Bluejackets' camp. Later on this distribution of the guns was altered, the 12-lb. field guns being moved to the advanced post on Junction Hill. One of the long 12-pounders was sent to Cæsar's Camp, and another to the west of Cove Redoubt, to reply to the guns on Surprise Hill and Rifleman's Ridge. Three of the Maxims were kept at Gordon Hill, and were never fired; the other was taken to Junction Hill to reply to the Boer snipers. Cove Redoubt was occupied by the other 4·7-inch gun called "Lady Mary," and the two remaining companies of the Liverpool Regiment. One squadron of the 19th Hussars was placed at the disposal of Colonel Knox. Section B extended from the west of Cove Redoubt by Observation Hill, Leicester Post, King's Post, and Ration Post to Little Rifleman's Post. The most exposed position was Observation Hill (divided, for purposes of defence, into Observation Hill West and East), but it offered a good clear field of fire for about 1,000 yards, and was consequently difficult to reach. The north-west end was about 1,700 yards north of the general line of defence, and was fifty feet higher than the average level of the posts behind, from which it was separated by a broad open hollow. Bell's Kopje, held by the enemy, was only

[1] These guns had taken part in the Jameson Raid, and had been captured at Krugersdorp. By a strange coincidence, they were commanded by the same officer at Krugersdorp and at Ladysmith. See for a further note on A Section, Appendix B.

1,400 yards distant beyond the railway. The outpost duties were at first performed by two squadrons of cavalry, furnished alternately by the 5th Lancers and 5th Dragoon Guards; but after the attack on November 9th, four companies of the King's Royal Rifle Corps and four of the 2nd Rifle Brigade garrisoned it in turn. In the last days of the siege, when infantrymen were becoming scarce, the eastern extremity was entrusted to two dismounted squadrons of the 5th Dragoon Guards, who erected sangars on it. A section of the 69th Battery was placed to command the approaches to it throughout the siege.

South of Convent Hill were Sir George White's headquarters, and close by the camp of the 2nd King's Royal Rifle Corps and the Ordnance Department depôt. On Leicester Post, at the beginning of November, were four companies of the 2nd Rifle Brigade and a section of the 69th Battery; afterwards, when Observation Hill was reinforced by the Rifle Brigade, their place was taken by part of the Leicesters or the 2nd King's Royal Rifle Corps. On King's Post were the other three companies of the Rifle Brigade, and the remaining section of the 69th Battery. Ration Post and Rifleman's Post were held by portions of the Leicester Regiment and the King's Royal Rifle Corps, the last-named position being connected by bridges with other parts of the line and reinforced by the 67th Battery. These various hills covered the cavalry camps lying in the hollow to the southward and eastward, and, as they afforded scope for cross fire and were amply supplied with guns and entrenchments, could await an attack with confidence.

The work of the 2nd Rifle Brigade is perhaps worthy of special mention as a striking example of the heavy and wearing strain which the greater part of the force had to undergo, not only at the commencement, but throughout the siege. The ground on King's Post and Leicester Post was extremely hard to entrench, the surface being covered with a layer of boulders from two to six feet thick, each separate stone of which had to be picked round and then levered out with crowbars. To add to this difficulty there was a great lack of suitable tools. "By hook or by crook, however, the work was done, thanks to the splendid spirit and energy shown by the men. . . ."

King's Post "was surrounded by a wall of earth and stones ten feet thick, and liberally supplied with palatial burrows, drained and provided with weather-proof head cover. Leicester Post also bristled with defensive works of great strength and dwellings equally palatial, but not quite so much underground, as the lay of the land rendered this unnecessary, providing, as it did, a certain amount of cover of itself. Here the habitations were to a great extent built of corrugated iron and match-boarding (the results of raiding on the tin camp[1] and elsewhere), and anything else that would stand up and keep off sun and rain, and, if possible, missiles."[2]

Day after day the wearisome work went on, varied by an occasional shell or the bullets of snipers. At night the spade was laid aside, and practically the whole battalion was out lining the defences. The chief danger lay in sudden night attack; by day the strength of the works and the character of the enemy was a sufficient guarantee for the safety of the positions.

When half the battalion took over the organisation of the defences on Observation Hill the same arduous task had to be repeated, this time under a frequent and occasionally heavy rifle fire from the snipers scarcely 2,000 yards distant as well as from their guns. Finally a body of sharpshooters were specially told off to deal with the Boers on Thornhill's Kopje, and by a fire at 2,800 yards they succeeded in keeping the enemy's guns quiet. Even then the labours of the Rifle Brigade were not ended, for after January 6th they took over Waggon Hill from the 1st 60th, and had to erect the defences which their predecessors, from want of numbers, had been unable to build. No corps of the Ladysmith garrison had a higher reputation to maintain or proved more worthy of its past renown.

C Section embraced the south-western and southern front of the line of defence. It is difficult to understand why Major Norris should ascribe the fire of the 94-pounder on Pepworth as the cause of the inclusion of Cæsar's Camp and Red Hill in the British lines. These hills certainly were the last to be occupied, but the more reasonable supposition

[1] The old camps in the hollow behind the hills.

[2] *Rifle Brigade Chronicle*, 1900, pp. 74, 75.

is that Sir George White, realising that he would be surrounded, saw that to allow the Boers to effect a lodgment on Cæsar's Camp and the ridges connected with it, would be to place the garrison at the mercy of the besiegers. As a matter of fact, the Pepworth gun was removed, to Gun Hill, north of Bulwana, at the beginning of December, because the enemy realised that the latter was a far more effective position than the former.[1] The great extension of the British lines involved by the inclusion of Cæsar's Camp was a necessity, but the danger which it was intended to counteract came from the south and not from Pepworth.

The Red Hill, including Range Post and Highlanders' Post, occupied by the remnant of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and half a company of Gordon Highlanders, was a weak point, for the Sign Post Ridge, 1,000 yards to its front and parallel to it, and the rugged ground between the two offered a good line of approach to the enemy. The nearest guns were those on Rifleman's Post. No artillery was placed on Red Hill until after January 6th. Nearly 1,000 yards south-east of Highlanders' Post was the eminence called Maiden Castle, held by a half company of Gordons, who occupied a large semicircular work built before the siege. On December 5th three companies of the same regiment were moved to Fly Kraal, under Cæsar's Camp ; the other four were encamped south-east of the Klip Bridge, and with the cavalry and two batteries of the 2nd Brigade Division formed a general reserve. Cæsar's Camp was held by the Manchester Regiment and the 42nd Battery, their left flank along the scrub-covered base of the hill being covered by the Mounted Volunteers of Colonel Royston. Towards the end of November a Naval 12-pounder was mounted on the Manchester position ; and on November 7th, as the enemy appeared to threaten Waggon Hill, that point was temporarily reinforced by 130 Light Horsemen. But it is worth noting that this part of Bester's Ridge was not at first included in the lines of defence, and only held in the daytime by six men and a corporal.[2] Later on it was permanently occupied by half a company of the Manchester Regiment, and about Christmas-time by three companies of the 1st King's Royal Rifle

[1] The ring of kopjes of the north largely protected the garrison from shell fire from that direction, whereas the whole of the eastern front and the camps north of Poundbury Hill lay exposed to the fire from Gun Hill.

[2] See Appendix D.

Corps and a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse. Consequently, during the first half of the siege the garrison of Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill did not number 1,000 men, and had over 5,000 yards of front to guard. In his preliminary disposition, Sir George White employed fully two-thirds of his infantry, all his Naval guns and about half his field artillery on the northern front.

The whole line over which the infantry force was distributed measured twelve and a half miles in length,[1] thus averaging about one mile to 500 men. The main body of the cavalry were quartered at Tin Camp and under Cove Hill. Later on the shell fire drove them to seek cover by day along the river banks, returning to the old camps at night. The front of the defences was covered by pickets, generally supplied by the battalions in the defences in rear. These defences were of various make, according to the nature of the ground and the special requirements of the position ; as a general rule they consisted of stone sangars and earthworks ; and in some parts were bomb-proof shelters, partly built above-ground with the help of railway iron and baulks of timber, partly in the form of subterranean burrows. The shelters of the Imperial Light Horse in the banks of the Klip River were very elaborate, the men turning to account a knowledge of shafts and galleries they had acquired in the mines of Johannesburg. For the works on the fighting front great quantities of sandbags were available, and all the posts were connected by telegraph or telephone with Headquarters.

The heavy duties entailed upon the defenders were lightened as far as was possible by a regular succession of reliefs. Route marching at night was resorted to, in order to give the men exercise. In spite, however, of all that could be done, the defence of so extended a front told heavily upon their physical endurance, and, it may be added, tended in many ways to restrict the garrison's powers of counter attack.

While these measures for the defence of the town were in progress the Boers, with characteristic deliberation, slowly made good their positions around it.

[1] General Hunter reckoned it as 28 miles including the zig-zags.

Joubert's tardiness and lack of initiative were sharply blamed by the more vigorous of his men. These demanded that the enemy should be closely pressed before they had time to recover from their defeats. But the general feeling of the commandos was very different. It was at such moments, when the force of discipline and strong organisation was needed to ensure vigorous conduct, that the weaknesses of the Dutch army became most apparent. Twenty thousand

GENERAL JOUBERT AND HIS STAFF.

regular troops under a leader of insight and decision would not improbably have compelled the English force to surrender, or in any case to struggle desperately for bare existence. But Joubert was no longer such a man, nor were his troops prepared to undergo the risks of assault. The old general was weighed down by the dread of losing men, and the burghers shrank from exposing themselves. Exact obedience under the Boer military system was not required, and consequently not given. Orders were only obeyed when, in the opinion

of the men, they were worth obeying. Some of the commandants seem to have been as blameworthy as their subordinates; while in other cases, when their own goodwill was unquestioned, they could not get their men to move in a body, and had to depend on the efforts of volunteers. What orders Joubert issued in the days following his victory are unknown; but whether from want of resolution and personal ascendency on his part, or sheer neglectful disobedience on the part of his men, or both, the Boer movements were slow, hesitating, faulty. One main cause for this disinclination to act was the exaggerated belief of the burghers in the power of long-range artillery. Why, they asked, risk an attack on Ladysmith when a few days would allow of the arrival of enough big guns to destroy the town and garrison lying helpless at their feet?[1] So reasoning, they leisurely proceeded to bring up and mount artillery on the different hills in their possession. By a solitary act of vigour they occupied Bulwana during the night of the 30th, with field guns. Lombard's Kop was similarly held; the base hospital was established with the headquarters near Pepworth's Farm, and a line of posts drawn between the hill of that name and Lombard's Kop. A great depôt was formed at Modder Spruit station, whither material of every kind was sent with all speed from the frontier.

The investment on the south-west of the town was not completed for three days, partly thanks to the efforts of the British cavalry, far more to the slowness of the enemy themselves. Not till the 2nd was the communication with Colenso broken; but from this day the town was completely shut in: Middle Hill, Rifleman's Ridge, Telegraph Ridge, and Surprise Hill were crowned with the enemy's guns and posts, and Boer detachments blocked the exit of the Klip Valley to the south-east. The serious bombardment did not commence till the 7th. From the 4th to the 6th there existed an informal armistice to allow time for the removal of the wounded, sick, and non-combatants to the neutral camp on the Intombi Spruit. These days were used by

[1] It has been suggested that the Boers at first allowed free railway access to the town, reckoning all stores brought in as an ultimate gain to themselves.

both sides to finish their preparations; but the British gained more by the respite than their enemies. By the time that the siege was undertaken in earnest the organisation of their defence was fairly complete; their sick and wounded were safe; and, buoyed up by the hope of an early release, they could look forward to the future with confidence. The Boers, the first precious days wasted, discovered that Sir George White, far from being at their mercy, was resolved to hold out to the last, and that the reduction of the town was likely to demand an expenditure of blood, time, and energy which they had never anticipated.

Though the week following the 30th was, as we have said, one of preparation rather than active operations, it had been marked by desultory exchanges of fire between the 6-inch on Pepworth and the Naval guns on the kopjes north of the town. Little serious damage had been inflicted, though several houses had been wrecked; and the bombardment on the 3rd had caused some panic amongst the inhabitants. The death of Lieutenant Egerton, R.N., who had both legs shattered by a shell while directing the fire of the 4·7-inch in the Junction Hill Redoubt, was the only casualty of importance.

The bombardment of these early days, small as was the damage to life, hastened one important measure—the formation of the neutral camp at the Intombi Spruit. Such was the panic caused by the shell-fire from the big gun on Pepworth that on the 4th, at the request of the Mayor of Ladysmith, Sir George White sent to the Boer commander to demand a free exit from the town for non-combatants, sick, and wounded. This request was naturally refused, but Joubert generously agreed to the erection of a camp at the Intombi Spruit. Its occupants were to be supplied once a day by rail from the town itself, and no irregular communication was to take place between them and the garrison. A meeting was held that evening to decide whether Joubert's offer should be accepted, and after an excited discussion a part of the population determined to abandon the town. During Sunday a mass of medical stores, wounded, and sick were transferred to their new camp. With these went a few of the townsfolk: "Most

of those had relations among the Boers or were Boers themselves."[1] The departure of the weaker-bodied or less courageous part of the population immensely strengthened Sir George White's position; the chances of a panic—the most serious danger with which Kekewich had to contend at Kimberley—were by the formation of Intombi Camp to a great extent eliminated; and the only serious inconvenience from a medical point of view that the camp possessed was the lowness of the situation. On the whole its neutrality was properly respected by both sides, though Boers occasionally visited it with a view of procuring hospital necessities. In spite of their plentiful supplies of food the enemy seem to have suffered considerably from disease during the later period of the investment.

Throughout the siege the enemy possessed an advantage in the superiority of their intelligence. The inadequacy of our Intelligence Department throughout South Africa has been much commented on. The collection of good information was certainly harder there than in other countries, owing to the untrustworthiness of the native spy and the peculiarity of his relations to the combatants. The general ignorance of the Kaffir and Dutch languages prevailing amongst our officers, and the meagreness of our secret service fund, further handicapped the military authorities. The Anglo-Dutch of Northern Natal generally favoured the enemy, so that in the machinery by which information is acquired our opponents were better off than ourselves. At the same time we cannot help thinking that our Intelligence Department would have done better had it placed more reliance in men like Colonel Dartnell, Chief Commissioner of the Natal Police, whose business it was to be thoroughly acquainted with the neighbourhood and its inhabitants, and who had shown his capacity during the retreat of General Yule from Glencoe. The collection of information in a country like South Africa is a duty which the local policeman, owing to his experience of the native mind, is far better qualified to undertake than any one else, for it consists mainly in the knowledge of individual character. Nevertheless, although for the above stated reasons the enemy's knowledge of our intentions

[1] Nevinson, p. 74. The *Times* report speaks of "dozens of able-bodied men" who might have taken part in the defence of the town.

was better than our knowledge of theirs, it may be questioned whether the importance of the spy question was not in some degree over-estimated. The successful sorties of December may be quoted in favour of this view. There seems always to be a tendency in time of checks and reverses to attribute the result to the presence of spies; whereas after investigation has generally proved these ideas to be baseless. Most of our early defeats in South Africa were ascribed to this form of betrayal; in hardly a single instance has the belief been substantiated. We may remind our readers that in 1870 the dread of the "Prussian spy" grew more and more to dominate the imagination of the French soldiery; yet in the deliberate opinion of German writers the spy was of little value compared with the reports sent in by their own troops.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST ATTACK ON LADYSMITH AND THE BOMBARDMENT

BOER GUN POSITIONS—JOUBERT DETERMINES TO ATTACK LADYSMITH—NOVEMBER 9TH, ATTACK ON OBSERVATION HILL—ON LIVERPOOLS AND DEVONS—ON CÆSAR'S CAMP—LIEUTENANT FISHER—BOERS REPULSED—THE TWENTY-ONE GUN SALUTE—BOER AND BRITISH LOSSES—CAVALRY SKIRMISH ON NOVEMBER 14TH—BAD MANAGEMENT OF BOER ARTILLERY—REASONS FOR THIS—THEIR PROPER COURSE—IMPORTANCE OF NAVAL GUNS—SIEGE METHODS OF BOERS—DAILY BOMBARDMENT—INCIDENTAL TARGETS—DISPERSION OF FIRE—SPECIAL TARGETS—THE HOSPITAL—NOCTURNAL BOMBARDMENT—THE FATAL SHELLS—LOSSES DURING SIEGE BY BOMBARDMENT AND SNIPING—GROWING FEEBLENESS OF BOMBARDMENT AFTER JANUARY 6TH—DISCOURAGEMENT OF THE BESIEGERS—THEIR EXAGGERATED BELIEF IN THE POWER OF ARTILLERY—ATTITUDE OF CIVILIANS AND TROOPS IN THE FACE OF THE SHELL FIRE

THOUGH the Boers can never be said to have prosecuted the siege with vigour, November 7th, since it saw the beginning of the bombardment routine, may be assigned as the first of the actual siege operations.

The enemy had some twenty[1] guns in position. On Lombard's Kop was a 4·7-inch howitzer; a similar gun was on Umbrella Hill, south of Lombard's Kop; and on and between that hill and Bulwana were four or five field guns. On Surprise Hill and Telegraph Hill were several field guns, and on Middle Hill and Pepworth Hill two 6-inch Creusots. On November 8th, a third 6-inch was placed on Bulwana. Certain changes were made from time to time, and the actual number of smaller guns, pompoms, and howitzers is differently given; but besides the four 4·7-inch howitzers, two British screw guns captured at Nicholson's Nek, and four of the field guns captured at Colenso, there were at least ten field guns and pompons present in the Boer lines during the earlier part of the investment. These lighter ordnance were unimportant as compared with the 6-inch Creusots, and above all

[1] Sir George White estimated the number at twenty-two.

the four .4·7-inch howitzers,[1] which did on the whole more execution amongst the personnel than the larger guns. The field artillery usually kept out of range of the British guns, and their fire was rendered ineffective by the necessarily high trajectory and the bad quality of the ammunition.

During the 7th and 8th the shelling of the lines and town was weak, purposeless, and almost resultless. Up to the morning of the 9th, the actual losses from bombardment did not exceed five. Dissatisfied with his subordinates, and disappointed at the small results of the shell fire, Joubert determined upon more vigorous methods. On the evening of the 8th he was heard to remark that "Ladysmith would have to be taken next day, or some other plan tried,"[2] and he gave orders for a general attack upon the British lines in the morning.[3]

At 4.40 a.m. the great gun on Pepworth gave the signal for the advance by throwing two shells into the British headquarters, fortunately without wounding anybody. By 5.30 all the Boer guns were in action, cannonading every part of the lines. At 6 a.m. Boers were reported to be advancing on Observation Hill West, and the gentle crests between King's and Leicester Posts and the Van Reenen Pass railway. The defenders at these points consisted of the Rifle Brigade and the 69th Battery, while the picquet line on Observation Hill and the slopes to its left was furnished by the 5th Lancers. At the foot of Leicester Post were two guns of the 67th, and on Rifleman's Post, held by part of the 2nd King's Royal Rifle Corps, the rest of the battery. Both groups of guns commanded the low bare slopes to the northward between the Klip River and the railway, and the deep cutting beyond them under Railway Kopje.

After a brisk fusillade the longer range of the Mauser began to get

[1] One of these was recently tested at Shoeburyness and gave excellent results.

[2] *Cornhill*, August, 1900.

[3] In the "Personal Reminiscences of a Free State Burgher," published in the Journal of the United Service Institution (September 15, 1902), it is stated that Joubert cancelled the orders during the night. If this was so, it would account for the feebleness of the so-called attack. The reason advanced for Joubert's change of plan is the unreadiness of one of his big guns. A contrary view is that Joubert at first gave orders for a night attack, changing them at the last moment in favour of an attack by day.

the better of the Lancers' carbines, and at 6.30 a.m. two companies of the Rifle Brigade were pushed forward to their support. As they advanced they came under shell fire from Bulwana and from their front, but reached the crest of Observation Hill with only one casualty. Here the rifle fire became hot, but the issue was never in doubt, and within an hour the enemy had retired or were in hiding, scarcely any remaining within the thousand yards zone. Their direct advance checked, the Boers developed a flank attack from the direction of the railway cutting. In so doing, however, they offered an excellent target for the British artillery, and the shrapnel bursting in front of the gorge, raked its centre and sides, and drove the enemy back in great confusion. Not daring to press again, they galloped rearward to the ridges of Surprise Hill, from which point as well as from Bell's Kopje they maintained a useless long-range rifle fire till midday. In repulsing this attack Lieutenant Lethbridge and five men of the Rifle Brigade were wounded, the former and one of the latter mortally.

Meanwhile an equally feeble attack had been repulsed by the Liverpool Regiment on Tunnel Hill, and the Devonshire Regiment holding the extreme right. The latter battalion, in their excellent shelters, suffered no casualties, though the long-range sniping to the northward was fairly brisk, and the big guns threw some forty shells into their position. The Liverpools as easily drove off a body of Boers who had descended to Bell's Farm. In this battalion there were three casualties, two privates being wounded and Sergeant Macdonald killed by a shell.

To the south of Ladysmith, at Cæsar's Camp, the fight was more stubborn, a fact due as much to the extent of the position and the weakness of the garrison as to the greater energy and numbers of the enemy. The huge ridge, the crest of which, including Waggon Hill, measured nearly 5,000 yards from east to west, had, until November 7th, been entrusted to the Manchester Regiment alone, and it was only during the night that this single battalion, numbering some 600 bayonets, had been reinforced by 130 Imperial Light Horse, who occupied Waggon Hill, and by the 42nd Field Battery, which took post on the inner crest line of Cæsar's Camp. The

Manchester outpost line was formed of five picquets who occupied the southern and south-eastern faces of the Camp, so as to hold under fire the Fouries Spruit Valley. The sangars corresponding to the picquets, and forming the main line of defence, were on the inner or northern edge of the plateau.

Though the Boer cannonade, which was heavier than that on January 6th, had continued since dawn, it was 10.30 a.m. before No. 2 picquet, on the right centre of the Manchester position, became engaged with Boers advancing from the southward. Working to the westward of this post, the main force of their attack broke upon No. 1 picquet, on the extreme right, held by half of C Company, under the command of Lieutenant Fisher. For a time the rifle fire was hot, the Boers striving to gain ground on the flank of the picquet. A body of foreign allies, said to have been a part of the Irish brigade, led the attack, and, forming front with some semblance of discipline, advanced to within easy range of Fisher's men, who drove it back with some well-aimed volleys, which laid some of its number on the field. A second column, headed by a leader bearing a red flag, was likewise repulsed, nor did the enemy endeavour again to press to close quarters. Nevertheless, the fire was so heavy that the picquet only held its ground with difficulty. At 11.15 a.m. the Lieutenant, who had been wounded in the shoulder a quarter of an hour before, called for reinforcements; and half G Company and two sections of D were eventually pushed into the firing line. The Boers appear to have endeavoured to turn both flanks, for about the same time A Company moved out to cover the left. For half an hour the fighting was very sharp, the opposing guns shelling the crests and the musketry rolling incessantly; but about twelve o'clock the fire slackened, although sniping was kept up for the whole of the day. No attempt could be made to bring in the dead and wounded until after dark. Lieutenant Fisher, whose detachment had borne the brunt of the fighting, did not report his wound till eight hours after it had been received. The battalion had lost three men killed and thirteen wounded, the Boers much more heavily. The total British casualties during the day only amounted to four men killed and four officers and twenty-three men wounded; those of the enemy

may have equalled this number, for on several occasions our gunners and riflemen found good targets and made full use of their opportunities. The Naval guns, after firing with effect throughout the morning, ended with a twenty-one gun salute in honour of the Prince of Wales's birthday. Ignorant of the cause of this unwonted outburst of fire and the far-resounding cheers that succeeded it the besiegers slowly withdrew, and the attack dwindled into long range sniping.

Thus ended the first attack on Ladysmith. The enemy had not only failed to obtain a success: they had not even closed with the defenders. The confidence of the garrison was proportionately heightened, and so easily had the Boers been driven off that many over-hastily concluded that a vigorous assault was beyond their power. The behaviour of some of the commandos, if their movements are to be regarded as offensive, was nothing short of ludicrous.[1] The events of January 6th hurried men into an opposite opinion, but we shall see that even on that memorable occasion their capacity for offensive tactics was limited.

The next days passed in comparative quiet, a desultory bombardment was the only sign of activity on the side of the enemy, and the first move was made by the besieged.

On November 14th Sir George White sent Brocklehurst with two regiments of Cavalry,[2] two field batteries,[3] two squadrons Imperial Light Horse, and the Natal Mounted Rifles, across the Klip River, with the object of working out round Rifleman's Ridge, discovering the enemy's strength, and, if possible, seizing one of their waggon convoys, several of which had been seen passing in the distance. The Mounted Volunteers pushed out and seized Star Hill, the Cavalry took cover from the fire of the guns on Blauuwbank crest and nek, Telegraph Ridge, and Surprise Hill, while the 69th Battery came into action near Range Post. A long artillery duel, of which the only definite result was the expenditure of 200 shrapnel, followed, but no effort was made to push on towards

[1] *Cornhill*, August. "With a Boer Ambulance in Natal" gives a curious picture of what constituted danger in the mind of the average Boer.

[2] 5th Lancers and 18th Hussars. [3] 21st and 67th.

Rifleman's Ridge, where it was believed by some that a Boer gun was disabled and temporarily abandoned. General Brocklehurst however, declined to risk an attack, and at 2 p.m. the troops were back in camp, their retreat having been molested by some shells from Bulwana and Pepworth, a range of 11,000 yards. The high trajectory rendered the projectiles ineffective, and not a man was hit, the entire casualties of the morning numbering four wounded.

As the weeks following this skirmish were chiefly remarkable for the shell fire to which the town was intermittently subjected, it will be well in this place to summarise the general characteristics of the bombardment, to which, as it produced no decisive results and was unmarked by the regular stages which usually occur in the history of sieges, it will be unnecessary to refer at length again. On only a few occasions, such as November 9th and January 6th, did the Boers employ all their cannon simultaneously, although a few shots were fired from every one of them daily, and the belief was current in the British camps that a few trained men went round and fired each gun in turn. Many of them being only field guns did little or no damage to the town, though they sometimes caused loss in the line of the defences. It was otherwise with the heavier ordnance, the fire of which, had it been directed with vigour and intelligence, might have produced a considerable effect, even if, through the want of good infantry and siege method, it could not have been decisive. A well-handled and steadfastly worked artillery might have greatly facilitated the approach of the riflemen, unwilling though the latter were to take risks. But the Boer guns, 6-inch Creusots and 4·7-inch howitzers, were neither handled systematically nor fought steadfastly. In the management of this arm the cardinal weaknesses of the burgher army were very apparent, and the presence of foreign officers proved unable to overcome their ignorance and want of discipline. No better instance of this can be given than their action in face of Captain Lambton's Naval guns. There seems now to be no question that the material effect of these weapons was greatly overrated at the time, and that the oft-occurring reports that they had silenced the Boer artillery were, so far as actual damage was concerned, generally unfounded.

The greatness of the ranges, varying from 6,000 to 9,200 yards, and the solidity of the Dutch emplacements, rendered an effective shot something of a fluke, while want of ammunition made it impossible for the gunners to increase the chances of a hit by firing more often. "In the early days of the siege twenty to thirty rounds would be fired from the 4·7″ guns every day at the enemy's gun positions, but the vital necessity for strict economy in ammunition soon becoming apparent as the days went by very often these guns would not be fired for a week at a time—in fact the 'Lady Anne' on Junction Hill was silent for six whole weeks during the later part of the siege. When it is considered that 200 rounds of lyddite, 200 of shrapnel, and 200 of common shell, with 600 cartridges, constituted the total available supply of ammunition for these guns on arrival in the town, it will be seen how necessary it was to fire only on the most favourable occasions."[1] At the end of the investment about eighty rounds were left. In view of these facts it is absurd to maintain that a more numerous, more powerful, and better-placed artillery was really prevented from doing its work, by a fire that averaged less than five rounds per diem. When, therefore, Sir George White said afterwards of the Naval guns, "Had it not been for these guns, the guns of the Boers would have been brought very much nearer to my defences of Ladysmith, and would have greatly embarrassed my power of resistance and enormously added to the mortality of my garrison," we must conclude that the failure of the enemy's artillery was due to the moral effect produced by the long range and powerful shells of the Naval ordnance, not by the fact that the destruction they inflicted made the howitzers and Creusots unworkable. That the fire had such an effect is proved by the letter of a German officer, who stated in December that the Naval shells "made the work in the Boer batteries very dangerous," and by another letter picked up during the sortie of December 7th, saying, "Near the town are two Naval guns, from which we receive very heavy fire which we cannot stand." The unwillingness to incur risk which, with a few exceptions, was a permanent characteristic of the Boer army throughout the first part of the war, made it

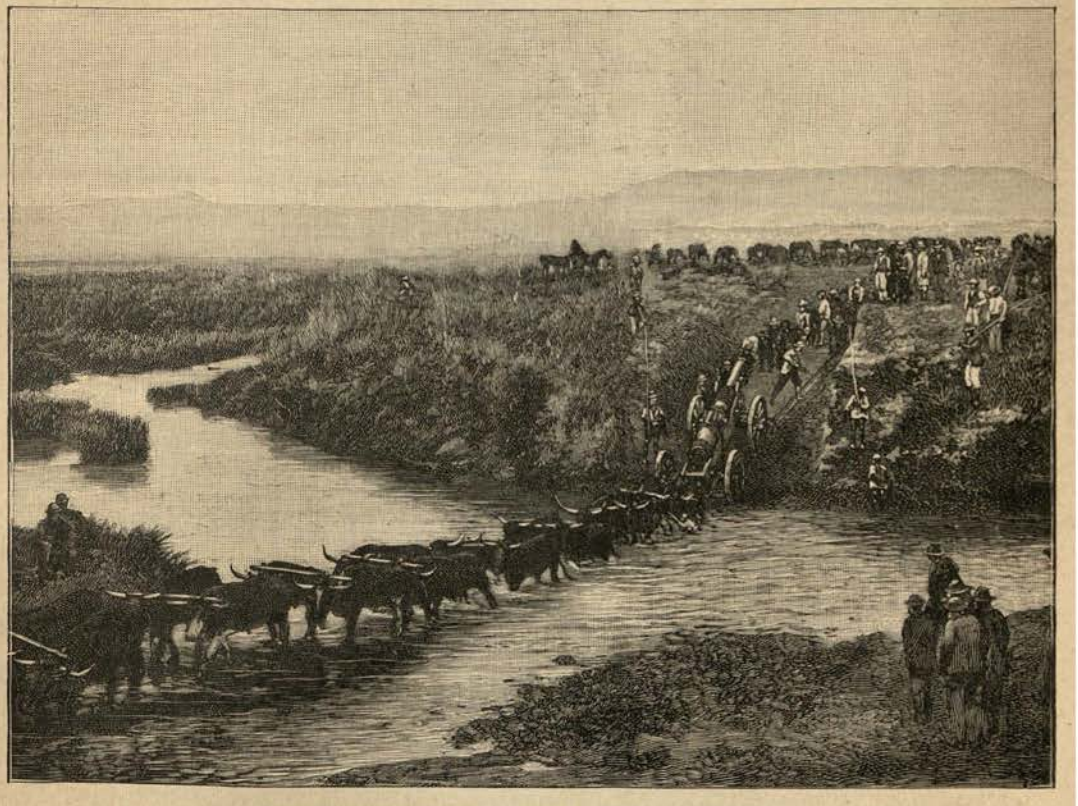
[1] "Naval Brigades in South Africa," p. 206.

impossible to obtain decisive results. The spirit which determines men "to knock the enemy out or get knocked out themselves" was unknown in their ranks.

At the beginning of the siege their artillerymen had to choose between two alternatives. They should either have persevered until they had destroyed or disabled the Naval guns; or, as would probably have been far the most effective course, disregarded the fire of these altogether, and concentrated their efforts against the more vulnerable, or at any rate the more essential, points of our defence. In support of this latter view, it may be said that the same conditions which prevented our sailors from producing greater material results militated equally against the gunners of the enemy. The elaborate emplacements, ammunition shelters, &c., constructed by Captain Lambton's men, made serious loss or damage almost impossible. Of the two Naval officers and twenty-five men who succumbed to wounds and disease during the siege, only a very small proportion fell to the Boer guns' fire, in spite of the numerous occasions on which it was directed against them. Perhaps the most important service rendered by the 4·7″ guns was this diversion of the Boer shells from our infantry lines. In the same way the 6·3-inch howitzers, which at first were fired from Waggon Hill against the Creusot on Middle Hill, and afterwards, when their opponent moved to Telegraph Ridge, were brought round to Ration Post, were allowed by the enemy to neutralise the fire of an infinitely more powerful piece of ordnance. In the first-named position the howitzers had the advantage of their indirect fire; in the second they were less successful, but there is no question as to their value in distracting the attention of the Boer gun. That they should so far have succeeded is certainly not creditable to the men who fought it.

Had the enemy's guns neglected the Naval artillery and concentrated their fire systematically upon some special portion of our lines, Cæsar's Camp for instance, they might by perseverance have obtained material results, and prepared the way for their riflemen. It is no disparagement of Captain Lambton and his men to say that their success in preventing this was mainly due to the inefficiency of the enemy. The defenders of Ladysmith were in the last resort field shrapnel and rifle

bullets, as the Boers found to their cost on January 6th. But instead of choosing a special point of attack, and pouring upon it day and night a steady bombardment, the Boer artillerymen contented themselves with scattering shell over every part of the vast circle of the British defences: a proceeding from which no decisive result could be expected. Their most favourite hours for firing were morning and evening, and day



BOER CREUSOT GUN CROSSING THE KLIP RIVER.

after day the big gun on Bulwana, one of the most troublesome of all, would throw about 25 rounds amongst the camps about breakfast and supper-time. In the middle of the day the gunners generally rested, and hardly ever fired on Sunday. But this desultory bombardment had the disquieting element of uncertainty, and no one was ever safe, for the Boers, applying the sniping tactics of riflemen, would fire on any good target that presented itself—cavalry horses being watered, a herd of

cattle, a detachment of infantry, or a group of officers—and it was impossible without a good telescope to tell by the flash of the gun which way the shell was coming. Several shots would fall into the Devons' position near the Helpmakaar road; then, without apparent reason, half a dozen would be thrown on to Cæsar's Camp, and as many into the town. Then the guns to the north and west would pound Observation Hill, drop shell into the old camps behind Howard's Section, and rake the reverse slopes of Waggon Hill. The camps where the Boers supposed the Imperial Light Horse to be, were constantly fired on. Sometimes several guns would be concentrated on some particular building in the town, the headquarters or the supply stores, or the ammunition magazine, or the hotel. During the early days of the siege the latter was always bombarded at lunch time, when many officers were likely to be in or near it, and several narrow escapes are recounted by the sojourners in the neighbourhood. According to the shell-chart published in Mr. Pearse's book, the environs of Ivy Lodge, Colonel Hamilton's brigade mess, at the crossing of the main street and the road from headquarters to the river camps, a space of about 150 × 200 yards, were struck by some thirty howitzer and Creusot shell from Bulwana, Pepworth, and Gun Hill, while the town hall, which had been fitted up as a hospital, was wrecked during the heavy bombardment of the 19th, 20th, and 21st of November. About a dozen men were hit while under the protection of the Red Cross flag. Schalk Burger had sent a letter inquiring the use of the flag, but before Sir George White's answer[1] had reached the commandant, "the Boer guns were deliberately turned on the town hall, which was several times struck."[2] Burger is said to have excused himself by saying that he understood that soldiers took refuge in the building. Finally, on November 30th, the hospital was again struck, wounding nine injured men and killing a tenth,[3] whereupon it was moved into a ravine out of the way of fire, a change which not improbably was responsible for many deaths, for the spot was most unhealthy.

[1] This hospital was intended for slightly wounded men and for ordinary cases of sickness which it was not worth while to send to Intombi.

[2] Despatch, March 23rd.

[3] Nevinson, p. 127.

The Boers made a great mistake in not harassing the garrison by nocturnal bombardment. In the middle of November for two nights in succession they opened a heavy fire from all their guns for a few minutes, and sent the inhabitants, many of whom were accustomed to live in the shelters by day and return home to sleep, in wild confusion into the streets. Hardly any casualties occurred, and the only other occasion on which the enemy fired during the night time was New Year's Eve.

The position of the troops on the line of defence was, of course, infinitely more arduous than that of the civilians in the town or the reserves along the river-bed; but the shell fire was distributed pretty equally between both. The total of casualties was, generally speaking, very small. Now and again, however, terrible mischief occurred. On November 23rd the Liverpools lost eleven men killed and wounded by one shell from the 6-inch Creusot on Bulwana, which burst in the middle of a shelter-trench. On December 18th another shell killed and wounded ten men and twelve horses of the Natal Volunteers, and the base of the projectile killed a sapper 300 yards away. The same day four Kaffir labourers and a white overseer were killed by another explosion, and on the 22nd five officers and the sergeant-major of the 5th Lancers were wounded by the river-bank, most of them being injured by the shingle scattered by the shell. In the evening the Bulwana gun threw a shell on to a stony slope where some of the Gloucesters were engaged in their evening meal. Eight men were killed and nine wounded. The last of these catastrophes occurred on December 27th, when another shell from the same gun skimmed over a massive stone shelter and entered the mess-tent of the Devons, killing Lieutenant Dalzel instantly and wounding eight other officers. It is noteworthy that the Liverpools, Gloucesters, and Devons all suffered on or near the slope of Junction Hill, the defences of which appear to have been partially open to enfilade from Bulwana.

These six shells, which accounted for forty-three men, fourteen officers, and thirty-one animals, gave frightful proof of the power of artillery upon men crowded together on hard ground. They were responsible for about one-third of the damage done by the bom-

bardment during the whole siege. The sorties, actions, and reconnaissances account for sixty officers and 512 men killed and wounded; the gun and rifle fire, apart from these occasions, for nineteen officers and 129 men. Excluding the days on which the fatal shells fell, it will be seen that on the other 113, five officers and eighty-six men were hit; an average of considerably less than one casualty per diem. A small number of whites and Kaffirs were also killed and wounded. To produce this result 11,000 shells were thrown into the defences or the town itself, to say nothing of the sniping which went on constantly at the outposts, and must have tried the nervous endurance of the men considerably, though the loss of life owing to it was very small.

The conduct of the siege reflects little enough credit upon the Boer general and his burghers. As at Mafeking, Kimberley, and Eland's River, they showed no power of driving an attack home, no willingness to face risk and losses in order to obtain a great success. After the failure of their best men on January 6th they relapsed into their old method of aimless bombardment, and relied upon disease and starvation to force Sir George White to surrender. As time went on, as sickness and desertion thinned the burgher ranks, as their guns wore out or were sent away to face Sir Redvers Buller on the Tugela, the shell fire grew more desultory and feeble, until at last the discouragement of the besiegers sunk into despair, and when it was known that Hlangwane was lost, a large body decided to retreat without further effort to the Biggarsberg.

If the hope of reducing Ladysmith by artillery fire was one that naturally commended itself to the caution of the burghers, there is no doubt that, like ourselves, they at first honestly attributed to heavy ordnance a power which it does not possess. They believed, as our generals believed at Colenso and Magersfontein, that shell fire would so shake the defenders that the capture of the position could be easily achieved after the long-range arm had had time to work its effect. Looking down upon Ladysmith from the surrounding hills, it may well have seemed impossible that the garrison could make a lengthy resistance. As soon as they had got up enough guns, the business

would be done. In waiting for these they gave us nearly a week to make our preparations, and then found themselves confronted with a smaller but more resolute and better-served artillery than their own. The material result of their gun fire was disappointing; might not more be hoped from its moral effect?

Here, again, they were shrewdly disappointed. All parts of the population, as well as the troops, soon displayed a remarkable indifference to the shells. Living in the shelters along the river-bank by day and sleeping in their own houses by night, they not only avoided the enemy's shot, but behaved with a patience and fortitude which did them honour. Many men pursued their usual avocations in the town; and there was one instance of a small farmer who ploughed his land industriously in spite of the shells that fell on his plot of ground, and ultimately reared a crop of vegetables which he was able to sell at a high profit. Never once, after Intombi Camp had absorbed the fainter-hearted, was there any sign of general panic.

Attempts were even made to get up athletic sports; up to the end of the siege cricket and tennis were occasionally played, and polo was continued until the horses became too weak. The full gloom of siege life did not settle upon the garrison till after Christmas, when rations began to diminish and sickness to increase; when their clothes were in rags and smaller comforts were unobtainable. The bombardment was endured with steady hardihood—almost with contempt. Some of this feeling was due no doubt to the presence of the Naval artillery, the moral value of which it is hard to over-estimate. Despite, however, the sense of security which these guns imparted, and the comparatively slight losses suffered from the bombardment, it would be idle to pretend that the latter was a trifling evil. During the first half of the siege it was the most important factor in the life of the defenders. The danger of being hit may have been small, but it was constant, and imposed a dull nervous strain, rarely counterbalanced by active operations or marked successes. It entailed increasing watchfulness and caution; it limited freedom of movement, and tried men sorely by its uncertainty.[1] The endurance displayed by a

[1] In a few cases reason gave way altogether.

beleaguered garrison is not rightly to be estimated by its losses in trench or camp. The unchanging monotony of the defensive, the growth of sickness, the dearth of food, the generally unfavourable moral and physical conditions, and the slight daily losses by fire or disease, are factors better calculated to test and to illustrate the discipline and steadfastness of the soldier. And though their enemy's incapacity relieved the defenders of the more stressful fatigue and more pressing perils which a vigorous antagonist would have forced them to encounter, it must be conceded that in their uncomplaining acceptance of laborious duty, their cheerful resolution to resist to the uttermost, and their unshaken firmness in fight, the officers and men of the Ladysmith garrison nobly upheld the traditions of the British Army.

CHAPTER III

CO-OPERATION WITH BULLER

CO-OPERATION WITH BULLER—WHITE'S POWER OF ACTION LIMITED AND DEPENDENT ON BULLER'S SUCCESS OR FAILURE—PREPARATIONS FOR CO-OPERATION—DEMONSTRATIONS—HUNTER'S EXPEDITION TO GUN HILL—IMPORTANCE OF SECRECY—SUCCESSFUL ATTACK—DESTRUCTION OF BOER GUNS AND RETURN TO CAMP—OPERATIONS TO THE NORTHWARD—CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCES—18TH HUSSARS COME UNDER HEAVY FIRE AND ARE WITHDRAWN—LOSSES—COULD WHITE HAVE MADE MORE USE OF HIS CAVALRY?—NIGHT SORTIE OF THE 10TH AGAINST SURPRISE HILL—DELAY DURING THE MARCH—THE GUN TAKEN—DELAY IN DESTROYING IT—THE 2ND RIFLE BRIGADE FIGHTS ITS WAY BACK TO CAMP—BRITISH AND BOER LOSSES—COLENSO—THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR

TOWARDS the end of November the repeated rumours of the advance of the Relief Column began to have a basis of fact. By December 4th the news of Clery's occupation of Frere and Buller's arrival at Pietermaritzburg were known in the town, and from that day until the 17th, when the news of the repulse at Colenso arrived, the garrison were in a state of restless expectation.

The questions foremost in men's minds were the date of the arrival of the relieving troops—for the idea of failure occurred to few—and the part that the garrison was to play in the decisive operation. On this last point great hopes were entertained both in Ladysmith and in England, but White's sphere of action was much more limited than was popularly supposed. In his message of November 30th (received in Pietermaritzburg December 4th) he says: ". . . At present cannot go large as I am completely invested, and must reserve myself for one or two big efforts to co-operate with relief force"; and the *Times* History[1] remarks: "From the information sent him by White, Buller concluded that Ladysmith could give him no direct help until he himself had got as far as Onderbrock Mountain, or Pieter's Station."

[1] Vol. ii. p. 439. See Appendix C on the question of co-operation.

Co-operation, indeed, was impossible until Buller's army was brought to bear on the blockading troops. As long as these held their positions intact and were not weakened in numbers, any attempt upon them would have been ill-timed and not improbably have ended in disaster. In the meantime it only remained for Sir George White to place everything in readiness to act as soon as the safety of the town and supplies, on which the garrison's existence, in case of the failure of the sortie, must depend, was ensured. This could only be at the moment when Buller's advance made it impossible for the Boers to attack the town in force. That they would hold their positions when Buller had driven their covering force from the Tugela close upon their rear was out of the question. If a relieving army beats a covering army as decisively as the results of a victory such as Pieter's Hill imply, the maintenance of a blockade becomes impossible. It will then depend on the relative strength of the garrison and the retreating army whether the former can safely endeavour to impede its retreat. Until, therefore, the enemy on the Tugela were so beaten that they could no longer protect the blockading force, Sir George White, the extent of whose lines did not allow of the retention of a powerful reserve, could take no decisive step, but merely hold himself in readiness to move when the proper moment arrived. Seriously to commit his troops while the success of Buller's operations was in doubt—until, that is to say, the Tugela barrier had been forced—would have been useless as well as dangerous. So strong were the Boer positions both round Ladysmith[1] and on the Tugela, that they were able without fresh dispositions to repulse the Relief Column and to observe the town, just as on January 6th they delivered their great attack on Ladysmith whilst a containing force remained at Colenso. The difficulty of combined action by two field forces separated by an enemy's army is great enough; it is enormously enhanced when the one is a besieged garrison, and the other a relief column in front of an unfordable river and a lofty mass of hills specially prepared for defence. One theory, namely,

[1] Little was done to fortify the hills, but they formed positions of great natural strength.

that White should have cut his way through to the Tugela, can only be termed preposterous. Such a measure would only have been conceivable in the case of Buller's ultimate failure, and when nothing remained to the starving garrison but its honour.

If, however, direct co-operation was impossible until Buller had broken through the Boer line on the Tugela, it was clearly White's duty to keep as many Boers round Ladysmith as possible, so as to facilitate the task of his superior. This he proposed to do by partial attacks and demonstrations. Meanwhile preparations were made to strike a decisive blow when the proper moment should arrive. More than half the infantry, three-fourths of the mounted troops, and five-sixths of the field artillery were told off to form a flying column. The troops were held in readiness to march, with four days' supplies packed on the transport. During the first week in December the selected units route-marched by night in order to harden the men. Precaution had also to be taken against attack, for it is possible that the Boers, urged by the approach of Buller, would make a desperate effort to force the lines before the latter could strike. On November 27th the besiegers received strong reinforcements, and unmasked a 6-inch gun on Middle Hill, but though everything seemed to prelude an attack from the south, nothing occurred.[1] On the 29th a plan of attack on Rifleman's Ridge, the quarter from which White seems to have expected that the relief column would advance, was given up, as the massing of the Boers in that direction suggested that the enemy were aware of White's intention.[2] For nearly a fortnight both sides watched each other in a strained inaction. At length, on the evening of the 8th of December, mainly in order to distract the enemy from the decisive point, *i.e.*, the southward, General Hunter, whose coolness, resolution, and courage

[1] A Krygsraad, held on the 29th, actually decided to attack the Platrand (Cæsar's Camp), but the project was for some reason abandoned (*Journal of United Service Institution*, September 15, 1902).

[2] This reinforcement of the hostile lines was very possibly (see last footnote) the result of their own project of attack, not, as the defenders supposed, a counter-movement to meet their sortie. The wisdom of an attack on Rifleman's Ridge, quite apart from the movement of the enemy, was very questionable. Had it succeeded, no particular advantage would have been gained, and the permanent occupation of the ridge would have been difficult owing to want of water.

during the siege will always be remembered, obtained his chief's leave to assault Gun Hill, and if possible destroy the battery there.[1]

Photo by] [*Bassano.*

GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD HUNTER, K.C.B.

[1] Major Henderson was the first to suggest the feasibility of the enterprise. The idea was taken up by General Hunter, who, it is said, proposed to send four bodies each of five hundred men to make simultaneous night attacks on Gun Hill, Bulwana, Middle Hill, and Surprise Hill, with the object of destroying the guns on all the enemy's principal artillery positions; but Sir George White refused on account of the risk, and went so far as to deny his consent to the attack on Gun Hill until Hunter offered to lead it himself. This story, at any rate, offers an explanation of the fact that the Chief of the Staff took charge of an expedition which should properly have been conducted by a battalion commander. Had the plan attributed to Hunter been carried out, there is good reason to believe that it would have succeeded. Baron A. von Malzan (*Nineteenth Century*, September, 1902) goes so far as to say: "I firmly believe that, had Sir George White organised a night attack in sufficient force, he could have broken through the Boer lines with ease and crumpled up the attack."

Gun Hill was a spur of Lombard's Kop, and between four and five hundred feet high. The upper portion of its western face looking towards Ladysmith was very steep and rocky; the lower slopes sunk gently into the sandy scrub-covered undulations which stretch to the eastern end of Devonshire Hill, from which point the top of Gun Hill is about 3,500 yards distant. On the crest of the spur in the early days of the siege the Boers had mounted a 4·7″ howitzer, firing smokeless powder, the fire from which was more harassing than the 6-inch Creusots, the smoke of whose black powder gave timely warning of their shot, This 4·7″ had been supported by other guns. About the first of December a 6″ was mounted on the ridge beside it; and these two guns, from their nearness to the flank of our northern defences, became the most formidable of all the Boer artillery. It was therefore extremely desirable that their fire should be silenced.

The first condition of success, absolute secrecy, was strictly fulfilled. The comparative smallness of the operation and the limited number of troops required made it possible for General Hunter to defer the issue of any orders till within an hour of starting, and up to that moment not a soul outside Headquarters had any knowledge of his project. Not until 10 p.m. did the Volunteers receive his order to parade immediately without horses and in light boots and forage caps. Half an hour later the chosen troops mustered outside the town. They consisted of 100 of the Imperial Light Horse under Colonel Edwardes, 500 Natal Carbineers and Border Mounted Rifles under Colonel Royston, eighteen Guides under Major Henderson, D.A.A.G., of the Intelligence Department, four Engineers, and ten men of No. 10 Mountain Battery, with gun-destroying appliances under Captain Fowke, R.E. General Hunter took command, impressed upon the men the necessity of complete silence, and gave the order to march.

Under a cloudy moon the Devon Regiment were dimly visible in support as the little column cleared the eastern defences and pushed on along the Helpmakaar Road until close upon the nek between Lombard's Kop and Bulwana. Then, wheeling to the left, it plunged into the rising scrub which, deeply intersected with watercourses, ran up to the foot of Gun Hill. Thanks to the excellent leading of the Guides, this point was reached at 1.40 a.m., when a brief halt was allowed.

The moon had already set, but the night was clear and starlit as Hunter made his final dispositions. Colonel Royston was left at the bottom of the steep ascent with directions to cover the flanks and rear of the storming party with his Volunteers. The Imperial Light Horse formed the left, the Natal Carbineers the right of the attacking column; Major Henderson on the extreme left was to move straight upon the position of the big gun redoubt on the centre of the crest line. The Guides and General Hunter were in front of the main body which now extended, Fowke and his men following in rear. Then with as little noise as possible the ascent began. So silent was the advance that one Boer picquet was passed in the darkness without either side being aware of it, and the British were half-way up when a voice behind them called out in Dutch "Who goes there?" No answer being returned the challenge was repeated, and the sentinel becoming alarmed fired his rifle. This roused another outpost near the summit, rifles sparkled along the crest, and a startled cry, "Fly, the rooineks are upon you!" rang through the darkness. Cheering loudly, the stormers, led by their gallant commander, scrambled up the rocks, and Major Karri Davis and Colonel Edwardes, with a happy inspiration shouted, "Go in with the bayonet. Give 'em the cold steel!" The only four bayonets in the column were carried by the engineers, but the name of the dreaded weapon was too much for the enemy, who fled in panic. The top was reached, a line of skirmishers hurried to the eastern side and fired volleys after the Dutch, who with shrill cries rushed down the opposite slope. Without delay the main body swung to the left, the Carbineers seizing a Colt automatic on a tripod and coming upon the howitzer emplacement as they ran along the crest towards the 6-inch gun redoubt. The Light Horse had already entered and found it unoccupied. One dead Boer lying near was all that was left of the enemy. With the utmost despatch the breech-blocks of the two big guns were removed, charges of gun-cotton placed in the breeches and muzzles by the engineers, and the storming party withdrawn into shelter. In two minutes a dull roar and a bright glare that lit the dark face of the mountain told that the work was accomplished. Part of the muzzle of the great Creusot gun was blown away, and the breech was split.

It was now 3 a.m. and no time was to be lost in retiring. The difficulty was to get the men away. The Light Horse, who had particularly suffered from the shells of the 6-inch, loitered round their shattered enemy, and hunted for portable relics amidst the underground shelters within the redoubts, where evidences of the hastiness of the Boers' flight was very apparent. One letter was also found bearing witness to the efficacy of the Naval gun fire and to the doubt and discouragement which had already begun to infest the burghers' ranks.

At length the whole force rejoined Royston at the foot of the ascent, bringing with them the breech block and rammer of "Long Tom" and the captured Colt. Their losses, considering the importance of the achievement, were very slight. Seven men had been wounded, and one, an Imperial Light Horseman, had been killed, and Major Henderson had been wounded in the thigh by some kind of slug or buckshot.

The whole force returned to camp without molestation. The Boers had been completely surprised, their picquets had given the warning too late, and the weak post of fifty or one hundred men on the summit had been utterly demoralised by the suddenness of the attack. Next day Schalk Burger expressed to an English surgeon his astonishment at the boldness of the feat. The loss of the guns was a heavy blow to the enemy,[1] for their supply of big guns was limited and they had no means of manufacturing more.

While this brilliant little operation was in progress three companies of the Liverpool Regiment under Lieut.-Colonel Mellor seized Limit Hill, "and through the gap in the enemy's outpost line thus created, a squadron of the 19th Hussars penetrated four miles to the north, destroying the enemy's telegraph line, and burning various kraals and shelters ordinarily occupied by them. . . ."[2] At the same time five companies of the Leicester Regiment visited two farms usually occupied by the Boers, but found them evacuated. As these operations had been conducted without loss it appeared probable that the enemy had unduly weakened his force on the north of the town in order to

[1] Two artillery officers were court-martialled for neglect of duty after the night sorties of December.

[2] Sir George White's despatch.

strengthen the covering army on the Tugela, and at dawn Sir George White sent out Brocklehurst with the cavalry [1] and the 53rd Battery in the hope that he would be able to get far enough north to damage the enemy's railway. Proceeding along the Newcastle Road, the leading regiments developed a front towards Pepworth's Farm and to the east of Surprise Hill, the 18th Hussars and Lancers being in front and the Dragoons with the battery in support. On reaching Macpherson's Farm, "under the left foot of Pepworth," they were assailed from all sides by a furious rifle and shell fire, the guns from Bulwana and Surprise Hill joining in. As it was apparent that the enemy were in greater force than had been expected, orders were sent to the 18th, who were the furthest advanced, to withdraw. But the execution of the order, owing to some mistake in the transmittal,[2] was delayed, and the Dragoons moving up in support lost some horses as well as three men wounded from shell fire. By order of the brigadier they were halted on reaching the nek on the Newcastle Road between Gordon and Junction Hills, so as to gain cover against the frontal fire, but their new position was within range of the field guns on Bulwana, and after remaining for some time exposed to the shells, they were permitted to withdraw behind Observation Hill. Thither they were followed by the 53rd Battery, which does not seem to have had an opportunity of coming into action. While these movements were in progress the fusillade had grown extremely hot, rivalling in its intensity that of Lombard's Kop. A large number of Boers occupied Bell's Farm, from which they raked the retiring squadrons as they dashed along the bare ridges. Only a highly disciplined cavalry could have preserved their order, but the Hussars, trotting back in close formation, were well in hand, and escaped with the loss of seventeen men wounded and two men and thirty-five horses killed. Nearly all the casualties were in B Squadron, which had covered the left between Pepworth and Surprise Hill, and came under a very heavy fire at short range as they rode back towards the railway line.[3] As the cavalry drew near the town our field guns and infantry opened

[1] 5th Lancers, 18th Hussars, 5th Dragoon Guards. [2] Nevinson, p. 153.

[3] Pearse, p. 112. The details of the reconnaissance are certainly obscure.

upon the pursuers, but the latter continued to fire on the horsemen until they were within the shelter of Junction Hill. The big gun on Bulwana ceased firing as soon as one of the 4·7″ guns opened upon it. After several conspicuous acts of individual courage the whole force got safely back to camp. The result of these different operations, says Sir George White, was the immediate return of 2,000 Boers from the Tugela.

In connection with this reconnaissance, the last operation of any extent in which the cavalry were destined to partake as horsemen, we may notice the criticism that Sir George White erred in not employing the cavalry more often and more vigorously. The results of the operations of the 3rd and 14th of November and that just described were certainly not encouraging. In the opinion of many eye-witnesses, however, the failures were due rather to bad management than the impracticability of the tasks themselves. The ground between the lines of besiegers and besieged is admittedly unfavourable to cavalry action, but the haphazard nature of the investment, and the carelessness of the enemy's outposts—a carelessness which was rather the rule than the exception—greatly modified the conditions, and probably offered a good many opportunities for raids on convoys and attacks on isolated camps, which were lost through over-caution. It is, however, only fair to the cavalry commander to remember that Sir George White's general attitude was, with a very few exceptions, a strictly defensive one. He never adopted, as did Colonel Kekewich at Kimberley, the policy of "keeping the enemy on the move," and it was not surprising that his inaggressiveness was reflected in the work of his subordinate. Without suggesting, like Baron von Malzan, that vigorous offensive action might have broken up the leaguer altogether, it is safe to assert with our present knowledge of our enemy that at Ladysmith he was treated with far too much respect. It is probable that in this as in other matters we see the influence of the events of October 30th, which inclined the British commander to refrain from any operations which were not in themselves essential and might prove costly.

Stimulated by the success of General Hunter's sortie, and in conformity with the general plan of occupying the enemy's attention on the

north of Ladysmith, Colonel Metcalfe, of the 2nd Rifle Brigade, obtained leave to make a second night attack, the objective being the Boer battery on Surprise Hill, which, since the middle of November, had continually harassed the troops occupying Observation Hill, Leicester Post, King's Post, and Cove Hills, and had driven the 18th Hussars to seek refuge nearer the river. This steep, flat-topped eminence (600 feet) was less than 3,000 yards from Observation Hill, and 4,000 from King's Post, both of which positions it completely commanded. The gun which had wrought the mischief was a 4·7″ howitzer.

Colonel Metcalfe's dispositions were, so far as the nature of the circumstances permitted, similar to those of General Hunter. He moved out to the west of Observation Hill at 10 p.m. on the 10th, taking with him five companies of his battalion, numbering twelve officers and 448 men, six engineers under Lieutenant Digby Jones, R.E., and five artillerymen under Major Wing (69th Battery). The latter, who knew the ground well, Ashby of the Corps of Guides, and Thornhill, the owner of the neighbouring farm, led the column. The undertaking was more dangerous than that of General Hunter, for to reach Surprise Hill it was necessary to penetrate between the Boers' positions on Thornhill's and Bell's Kopjes. Scarcely had the force reached Observation Hill than the moon, breaking through the clouds, threw so brilliant a light upon the ground that had to be traversed that the troops had to halt and lie down for an hour to avoid being seen. The moon having set behind Surprise Hill, the advance was resumed, again to be checked by the barbed wire along the railway. The noise made in cutting a gap might easily have warned the enemy, and Colonel Metcalfe expected to have to fight his further way through rifle fire, but the Boers made no sign, and the column, moving in fours, reached the steeper part of Surprise Hill at 2 a.m. Half of E Company, under Lieutenant Byrne, was left in reserve at the railway line, the other half in a donga between Bell's and Thornhill's Kopjes. Captain Gough's company formed the right of the stormers, half of Major Thesiger's the left; the other half was in support. B and G Companies wheeled outwards right and left to cover the flanks and secure the

line of retreat. The sappers and gunners followed Gough and Thesiger, the whole of the storming party being under the command of the Colonel.

The force now advanced in single rank, and, despite the noise made in scrambling over the rocks, had almost completed the ascent when a Boer sentry challenged and fired his rifle. Others on the ridge fired irregularly. The riflemen cheered and dashed up to the crest with the loss of only three men wounded. The gun-pit was found empty, but the gun itself was discovered a few yards away. The few men forming its escort fled precipitately. The line of stormers then pushed on over the plateau, cleared out a small artillery encampment on the further crest, and began pouring a heavy fire into the darkness beneath, so as to check a counter attack.

Thus far the enterprise had succeeded, but a defective fuse attached to the bursting charges of gun-cotton delayed the destruction of the gun. The shell-magazine close by was blown up at the first attempt, but it was half an hour before the howitzer was disabled and the storming party could leave the hill.

When it had got about a third of the way down a heavy rifle fire suddenly opened from both flanks. Large bodies of the enemy, consisting mostly of Pretoria men, began to close in on the line of retreat from the direction of Bell's Farm and Thornhill's Farm, and others filled the dongas lower down the hill. The whole of Metcalfe's column was now under fire, especially the descending stormers, whose figures were visible against the sky-line. The Colonel at once ordered the detachment not to fire but to fix bayonets,[1] and the command was promptly obeyed. With slight losses the Riflemen drove the Boers before them, and passing between the supporting companies, reached the level ground. B and G, however, standing fast until they could be sure that the rest were safe, were temporarily surrounded. They had now to fight their way back through dongas thronged with the enemy, who took advantage of the darkness to call out the British

[1] The word "bayonet" was used on this night instead of "sword," the regular appellation for the side-arm in the Rifle Brigade, as it was thought more likely to alarm the enemy.

countersign "Dundee," the names of officers and the initials of companies. Captain Paley and his men, hearing the supposed friendly voices, hurried to the edge of a donga to find it full of Boers, who poured in two murderous volleys. Paley, struck by three bullets, fell into the ravine, and many dropped with him, but the remainder of the company closed with the bayonet. The Boers had no time to fly, and our men made no attempt to use the rifle. The struggle was short and bloody; the Riflemen burst through their opponents, and leaving not a few dead enemies behind them, regained their comrades.

Other combats of the same kind had taken place on the left, and everywhere the enemy gave way. Startled by the suddenness of the shock, they made no attempt to pursue, and the British column re-forming with admirable steadiness, and bearing with them thirty-five of their own wounded, returned without further molestation to Ladysmith.

It was known afterwards that the Boers had, in consequence of the attack on Gun Hill, strongly reinforced the neighbouring positions. The Rifle Brigade reached Leicester Post about dawn, the whole operation having taken, as in the case of Hunter's expedition, about six hours. Our casualties amounted to one officer and sixteen men killed, three officers, including the Colonel, and thirty-seven men wounded, and six missing. The removal of most of their wounded by the fighting troops [1] is a striking testimony to the masterful strength with which they cut their way through, and to the coolness exhibited by all ranks.

Encouraged by these successes, other demands of the same nature as Metcalfe's were made, but not granted, partly because the Boers were now on the alert, partly no doubt because Sir George White was unwilling to risk more lives on enterprises which the Relief Column was soon to render unnecessary. On the 12th the Town Guard and local Rifle Association were called out to defend the river front towards Bulwana, with the view of freeing more of the regular troops for active operations. On the evening of the 14th orders were published redistributing the troops in a flying column and a defence force; and a 4·7-inch and a long 12-pounder were placed on Waggon

[1] Only four stretchers accompanied the column.

Hill ready to assist in Buller's advance. During these days firing was heard to the southward, but Sir Redvers Buller having sent no warning, as he had undertaken to do,[1] of the intended attack, it was not known whether a battle had been fought or not. On the 16th, Dingaan's Day, the Boers shelled the town heavily in the early morning, but again the rumour of an attack proved baseless. By this time Sir Redvers Buller's announcement of his defeat had arrived.

With the dreary controversy which has raged over this question, so far as it concerns the Government and Sir Redvers Buller, we have not now to deal. But no account of the siege of Ladysmith would be complete without the inclusion of General Buller's message and Sir George White's reply. The first ran as follows:—

"16th December, 1899.

"I tried Colenso yesterday, but failed; the enemy is too strong for my force, except with siege operations, and those will take one full month to prepare. Can you last so long? If not, how many days can you give me in which to take up defensive position? After which I suggest you firing away as much ammunition as you can, and making best terms you can. I can remain here if you have alternate suggestion, but unaided I cannot break in. I find my infantry cannot fight more than ten miles from camp, and then only if water can be got, and it is scarce here."

Sir George White replied:—

"16th December, 1899.

"Yours of to-day received and understood. My suggestion is that

[1] "No. 58. Dec. 4th . . . . I cannot yet say which route, but will [? communicate] with you in several cipher messages before I advance. I shall also send searchlight messages in clear, but they will be false ones sent in order to deceive enemy." The reason why no warning of the attack was sent was that messages from White had given the impression that no help was to be expected from him until the Relief Force had crossed the Tugela. Had the result of the battle of Colenso been favourable, Sir Redvers would have called upon his subordinate to co-operate on the next day. See Appendix C. The facts disclosed by evidence given before the Commission somewhat modify the views developed in the text, pp. 44–46.

you take up strongest available position that will enable you to keep touch of the enemy and harass him constantly with artillery fire, and in other ways as much as possible. I can make food last for much longer than a month, and will not think of making terms till I am forced to. You may have hit enemy harder than you think. All our native spies report that your artillery fire made considerable impression on enemy. Have your losses been very heavy? If you lose touch of enemy, it will immensely increase his opportunities of crushing me, and have worst effect elsewhere. While you are in touch with him, and in communication with me, he has both of our forces to reckon with. Make every effort to get reinforcements as early as possible, including India, and enlist every man in both colonies who will serve and can ride. Things may look brighter. The loss of 12,000 men here would be a heavy blow to England. We must not yet think of it. I fear I could not cut my way to you. Enteric fever is increasing alarmingly here. There are now 180 cases, all within last month. Answer fully. I am keeping everything secret for the present till I know your plans."

As we now know, Sir Redvers Buller's message was not intended to bear the construction which most people, reading it in combination with that sent to Lord Lansdowne, were not unnaturally inclined to place upon it. This alarming representation was despatched in the hope of rousing the commander of the garrison from the state of nerveless inaction in which Sir Redvers conceived him to be.[1] As a matter of fact, Sir George's policy, whether it be open to that accusation or not, was in no way altered by the message. So amazing appeared its purport to the Ladysmith staff that Sir George's famous reply was sent, not as an encouragement, but primarily in order to make sure that the enemy had not obtained

[1] Evidence, Vol. II., p. 175. Events of the 16th to 18th December. See also 15,356: "I did consider that Sir George White was a man who would never give up Ladysmith if he could possibly keep it, but I did not consider that he had much initiative for active fighting."

possession of the secret cipher, and that General Buller was really the author of the "surrender" telegram.[1]

The news of the defeat was a bitter disappointment to the garrison. But the closing words of the brief paragraph in which it was announced were as worthy of the temper of the troops as they were honourable to the General who wrote them: "Sir George White is confident that the defence of Ladysmith will be continued by the garrison in the same spirited manner as it has hitherto been conducted until the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa does relieve it."

General Buller's failure inevitably increased the difficulties and dangers of the garrison. A likely sequel of the repulse of Colenso was an assault on Ladysmith, and a general order was issued detailing anew the distribution of troops, and appointing those units which had formed the Flying Column to act as a reserve under the command of Sir George White. The infantry of this force was to be furnished with mule-waggons,[2] so as to facilitate their rapid transport to any point that might require reinforcement. Other arrangements were also made to meet a sudden attack.

But for three weeks their efficacy was not put to the proof. The old year dragged slowly on without anything of decisive importance occurring. The bombardment, to which, in view of further calls on their ammunition, the British could not reply so freely as hitherto, continued in its dangerous monotony. Buller's guns were occasionally heard thundering against the Colenso trenches, but it was known that immediate assistance was out of the question. The garrison were in communication with the Relief Column by heliograph, but had no searchlight.[3] Though they could receive messages, they could not send any when the sun was not shining, a disability which, on a memorable occasion, was to cause England nearly two days of terrible anxiety. For the rest the time passed as in the earlier days of the siege, though the population were now beginning to feel the pinch of privation, and the cases of

[1] 14,887.

[2] This measure seems to have been abandoned owing to the difficulty experienced in moving the long columns of carts with speed and safety.

[3] The distance, over thirty miles, was too great for lamps.

enteric and dysentery showed a marked increase.[1] The day before Colenso 600 men were in hospital at Intombi, and the losses by fire were thirty-eight killed and 251 wounded. On the last day of the year the total of sick had risen to 1,558, enteric and dysentery being mainly responsible for the increase.

On December 21st Sir George White, who was himself suffering from low fever, had his quarters wrecked by shells, and was forced to move elsewhere. By Christmas he had so far recovered that he came to look on at the festivities which Colonels Dartnell, Rhodes, and Karri Davies had got up for the sake of the children, of whom a considerable number still remained in the town. From the change in tone of letters of correspondents it is to be gathered that the first terrors of shell fire had long passed away. A surprising number of civilians continued their daily occupations in spite of the constant risk involved in so doing; one poor seamstress worked day and night in order to be able to buy food at the high prices demanded; a saddler, whose services were greatly in request, had laboured incessantly since the siege began; tailors were doing their best to keep the military and civilian population clothed.[2] The courage and perseverance of these men deserve to be remembered.

The question of the food-supply will best be treated in connection with the last weeks of the siege, when it became of paramount importance. But it may be noted here that up to Christmas, although luxuries were fast running out and civilians were suffering considerably from the rise in prices, the arrangements of Colonels Ward and Stoneman had prevented anything like starvation. Rations of plum-pudding, for instance, were at that season served out to the troops, and the necessaries of life were still to be had in sufficient abundance. Nevertheless, in consequence of the loss of 228 cattle on November 25th, which, through the carelessness of the guards, had been allowed to stray over to the enemy, the meat rations for natives had already been reduced; while the animals, in spite of this decrease in their numbers, were beginning to suffer severely from want of fodder.

[1] Sir George White's message, December 18th.

[2] Pearse, p. 172.

So the old year passed away without incident, except that the enemy opened a heavy rifle fire at midnight on the 31st, apparently in expectation of an attack. On the night of January 5th there was nothing to indicate that the Boers had resolved to make a desperate assault upon the British lines, and that within a few hours the fate of Ladysmith would be trembling in the balance.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT ASSAULT

DISSENSIONS OF THE BOER LEADERS—KRIGSRAAD AT COLENSO—RESOLUTION TO ATTACK LADYSMITH—BESTER'S RIDGE CHOSEN AS THE POINT OF ASSAULT—GARRISON OF THE HILL—CÆSAR'S CAMP AND WAGGON HILL—BOER PLANS—ADVANCE AND STRENGTH OF ATTACKING COLUMNS—ATTACK ON CÆSAR'S CAMP—PICKETS KILLED OR DRIVEN IN—FAILURE OF BOERS TO PRESS—HARD FIGHTING ON THE CREST—ABDY'S BATTERY ON THE FLATS BY THE RIVER—THE BOER RESERVES CRUSHED—THE CANNONADE—ARRIVAL OF 2ND RIFLE BRIGADE—MILL'S FIGHT ON THE PLATEAU—CARNEGIE'S CHARGE—ARRIVAL OF GORDONS—FIGHT STATIONARY—RENEWAL OF FIGHTING ON CÆSAR'S CAMP DURING STORM—ENEMY DRIVEN OFF AT 5.30—WAGGON POINT SURPRISED—LIGHT HORSE DRIVEN ON TO NORTHERN SLOPE—MACNAGHTEN CAPTURED—THE LIGHT HORSE MAINTAIN THE POSITION—ATTACK ON WAGGON HILL—PICKETS DRIVEN IN—THE LIGHT HORSE ABOVE THE NEK—BOER FAILURE TO PRESS HOME—ARRIVAL OF BRITISH REINFORCEMENTS WITH HAMILTON—MILLER-WALNUTT TO WAGGON POINT—THE 21ST BATTERY IN ACTION—FAILURE OF 60TH TO DRIVE ENEMY OFF WAGGON HILL—LIGHT HORSE HARD PRESSED—SIR GEORGE WHITE MOVES UP THE CAVALRY—ATTACKS SLACKEN—THE FIELD OF BATTLE—ATTACK OF DE VILLIERS ON WAGGON POINT—HAND-TO-HAND STRUGGLE ON THE SUMMIT—THE POSITION SAVED—LAST ATTACK ON WAGGON POINT—TENACITY OF BOERS ON WAGGON HILL—PARK'S CHARGE WITH THREE COMPANIES OF DEVONS—END OF THE ACTION—CHARACTERISTIC TACTICS OF THE ACTION—ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE POSITION—BOER STORMERS ILL SUPPORTED AND TRUST TO FIRE EFFECT ALONE—VALUE OF THE BAYONET—THE COMBINATION OF FIRE AND SHOCK TACTICS—INADEQUATE DEFENCES—STOPPING POWER OF ARTILLERY—BOERS FINALLY OUTNUMBERED—ESTIMATE OF BRITISH FORCES ON THE HILL—BELIEF THAT THE BOERS WOULD ATTACK AGAIN—DEMORALISATION OF THE ENEMY—BOER AND BRITISH LOSSES—ATTACKS ON NORTHERN DEFENCES BEATEN OFF

TOWARDS the end of the year the dissensions of the Boer leaders, accentuated by anxiety and the growing difficulties of the situation, had come to a head. The continued resistance of the garrison, the increasing sickness and desertions in their own ranks, the reinforcements that Buller was fast receiving, united to convince the more vigorous that unless Ladysmith could be taken, and a bold campaign begun to the southwards, their main army would be forced to retreat, and the initiative which they had hitherto held would pass finally and irrevocably into the hands of the enemy. They had relied on the

effect of a brilliant offensive against Durban, but the wave of invasion had broken against White's defences. They had hoped to overrun Natal, and their weak column had fallen back nerveless before Buller's advanced guard. The repulse at Colenso had gained them time, but of that respite they had made no use.

The only result of their success had been a strengthening of the enemy's resolution, the sending of large reinforcements to the relieving force, and the mobilisation of a fresh and powerful army under the command of one of the most famous of English soldiers. Ladysmith then, the fall of which would double their material strength and quadruple their moral courage, must be taken at once, or all hope of ultimate success abandoned.

Instructions enforcing these views arrived from Pretoria, and, at a great Krigsraad held on January 2nd, they were fiercely pressed and obstinately combated. The strength of the English defences and the spirit of the garrison were known, and the fainter-hearted shrank from the risk and uncertainty of an assault. Joubert, unable to free himself from the fetters of political intrigue and from the dread of bloodshed which so fatally weakened his generalship, appears to have pleaded the adequacy of a continued bombardment. Only after a long debate, rendered yet more acrimonious by civil jealousies, was it decided to adopt the bolder plan, and to assault the Platrand.[1] To Joubert and Prinsloo was left the choice of the day.

White seems long to have expected an assault, and probably knew that something was afoot, but what the enemy would do, and when he would do it, was, of course, quite uncertain. Hence no special preparations were made, and when long before dawn on the 6th the population of the town were awakened by the sound of rifle fire, most men regarded it merely as an affair of outposts.

Throughout the investment the Boers had regarded the Platrand as our most vulnerable point. The crest of this plateau was 400 feet above Ladysmith, and about 3,000 yards from the point where the southernmost houses run down to the Klip river. Hence its capture would not

[1] The Boer name for Bester's Ridge, which comprised the two portions called Waggon Hill and Cæsar's Camp.

only have brought the Boers within long rifle-range of the town, but would have enabled them to enfilade the whole of our western defences and taken those on the north in reverse. How long such a situation would have been endurable is fortunately not the question here; it is difficult to believe that the defence could have continued long.[1] It is enough that the possession of the hill was essential to the system of defence, and that in selecting it as their objective the Boers made the best possible choice. This vast salient was, moreover, tactically speaking, weak. The length of its crest from Waggon Point to the eastern extremity of Cæsar's Camp, measured in a straight line, was 4,500 yards; and both flanks were in the air, unprotected by positions from which a cross fire could be brought to bear on an assault from the southward. Including the eastern scrub held by the Natal Volunteers, the front measured nearly four miles. For purposes of defence the hill was divided into two portions. That on the east, Cæsar's Camp proper, was about 2,500 yards long, and on the night of January 6th was occupied by the Manchester Regiment, 560 bayonets, the 42nd Field Battery, a Naval 12-pounder, and a detachment of Natal Naval Volunteers with a 3-pound Hotchkiss and a 9-pounder. The main defences were on the inner or northern edge of the flat top of the hill, and consisted of five solidly built stone sangars with walls six to seven feet high and eight to twelve feet thick, capable of resisting 6-inch shells and of holding between them over 400 men. They were placed at fairly regular intervals, and numbered from right to left. No. 5 was strengthened by a smaller secondary work on its right. In front of these on the southern and south-eastern edge overlooking Fouries' Spruit and Bester's Farm was the picquet line. This followed the contours of the hill on and below the ridge line closely, and was divided into five sections, numbered like the sangars. It was only intended

[1] In view of such an eventuality a second line was prepared after January 6th along the river banks, enclosing the south front of the town. It is doubtful whether it would have fulfilled its purpose. Had the Boers taken Cæsar's Camp, Maiden Castle and Red Hill would have become untenable. They would have occupied these, and then attacked Poundbury and Pavilion Hills, from which the secondary line along the river-bed would have been enfiladed. Questioned one day as to the proper steps to be taken if Cæsar's Camp fell into the enemy's hands, Colonel Ian Hamilton could only reply, "Well, we should have to take it from them." See Appendix D.

for observation or skirmishing resistance, and in order not to draw shell-fire no works had been erected. Rifle-pits, however, had been sunk, and these, together with outcrops of rock, long grass, and occasional trees, had up to that time given adequate protection. In fact, until the morning of the 6th, this picquet line had never been located by the enemy's gunners. This winding and broken hill front was regularly occupied by about half the battalion in line of groups, the other half garrisoning the sangars in rear. Each half relieved the other daily at 3.30 a.m., a few men remaining in the sangars while this was taking place. The artillery were dotted about on the plateau so as to command the hills to the southward: four guns of the 42nd Battery in substantial pits on the left of No. 1 sangar, the remaining section behind No. 3, the Naval gun on the right of No 1, the Natal Hotchkiss on No. 3 picquet line, the 9-pounder to the rear of it. With the possible exception of the Hotchkiss, none of these guns could command the southern slope of Cæsar's Camp, while the coverless plateau, from 400 to 800 yards broad, made it very difficult to reinforce the picquet line from the sangars behind. Moreover, if the front line should happen to be captured there would be great difficulty in again driving the enemy from the southern edge. On the west the right flank of the Manchesters rested on Waggon Hill, on the east their left joined Royston's picquet-line on the bush-covered slopes above Intombi.

Waggon Hill, the western portion of the mountain, was separated from Cæsar's Camp by a slight nek. It measured over a mile of front, and was intersected about 500 yards from its end by another slight depression, to the west of which rose Waggon Hill West, or Waggon Point, so called from the curiously shaped trees near its summit. Here had been placed, on the eve of Colenso, the 4·7″ and the long 12-pounder, and the empty gun-pits on the brow of the hill together with a length of flimsy wall, a few stones high, constituted the sole artificial defence. The Point was held by part of a squadron [1] of the Imperial Light Horse; and on the adjoining nek was a 3-pounder Hotchkiss gun under Lieutenant Walker, of the Natal Field Artillery. On the northern slope of the nek were the old howitzer emplacements, now vacant. Waggon Hill itself was destitute of guns; it was occupied

[1] About 70 men. See Appendix D.

by the rest of the squadron of Light Horsemen, and three companies of the 1st King's Royal Rifles. The southern crest was dotted by some shallow rifle-pits and a few loose piles of stones. Altogether the garrison of Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill numbered about 900 bayonets, six field guns, one long-range 12-pounder, and three other pieces. The nearest supports were three companies of Gordons at Fly Kraal, north of Cæsar's Camp.

The decision of the Krygsraad had been generally known in the commandos since the night of January 2nd, but the time fixed for the assault had been kept secret, and was not announced till the evening of the 5th, when the men were ordered to provide themselves with two days' rations and 300 rounds of ammunition. The occasion was one of peculiar solemnity and hazard, and before starting the commandos destined to take part in the attack assembled in front of their leaders' tents, and their chaplains offered up prayer for the success of their enterprise. Then the burghers swung themselves into their saddles and silently rode forward towards the point of attack. By midnight several columns were approaching the hills south of the Platrand. From behind Bulwana 900 picked Transvaalers from the Heidelberg, Utrecht, Wakkenstroom, and Standerton contingents reached the kopjes above Bester's Farm. At nine o'clock De Villiers, with the Kronstadt, Heilbron, Harrismith, and Winburg men, left his camps and advanced towards Middle Hill. Long before dawn some 7,000 Boers must have been gathered within field-gun range of their objective, the long, dark ridge looming to the northward. The hour fixed for the assault was 3 a.m.; and the stormers were to be assisted by feints on every part of the defences, and by the whole of their artillery.

The plan of attack was simple and comprehensive. The Boers had resolved to deliver a simultaneous attack upon the front and flanks of Bester's Ridge. They calculated on reaching the crest and overwhelming the first line of defence before the alarm could be given, and then, having gained commanding positions on either end of the hill, to drive the defenders off it by sheer weight of fire. To De Villiers was assigned Waggon Hill, to the Heidelbergers Cæsar's Camp, the front

facing Bester's Farm to 600 men of the Vryheid and German commando. Louis Botha with 600 men was to come from Colenso and form a reserve.

We shall first follow the fortunes of the Heidelbergers. At Fouries Spruit, then almost dry, they divided into two columns. One was to ascend northwards from the spruit, climb the rocks on the eastern extremity of the south face, and storm the picquet-schanzes. The other was to make a compass to the right, reach the east face of the Camp by the bush-covered slopes running down towards Intombi and the Klip, and getting in rear of the picquet line enfilade the main sangars and the reserves.

It must have been some time after 2 a.m. when the Transvaalers began to advance and noiselessly—for they had removed their boots—to clamber up the boulder-strewn gullies that seamed the mountain. In the British lines there was absolute silence except where on Waggon Point detachments of Engineers, Bluejackets, and Gordons were engaged on the gun-pits which they were again preparing for the Naval guns.[1]

At 3 a.m. a burst of firing rang out in the direction of Waggon Hill, and grew hotter as dawn drew near. As yet all was quiet on Cæsar's Camp. At 3.30 the reliefs moved out as usual, but as the firing continued, the companies who had been on guard were not withdrawn, and at 4 a.m. nearly 500 men of the Manchesters were in position on the southern edge, Colonel Curran and his adjutant amongst them. The sound of footsteps was now clearly audible amongst the rocks below, and firing was soon in progress along the whole front. So far as picquets Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 were concerned there was no surprise. They opened fire on any Boers they saw, and held their positions without difficulty throughout the day. The right attacking column had arrived an hour late, to find their enemy in force and prepared.

On the extreme left of the British position the Boers had been more fortunate. A small column of Heidelbergers had struck upon a squadron of the Border Mounted Rifles on the slopes above Intombi, and passing themselves off as the Town Guard, had got to close quarters before their identity was discovered. They then fired into the group of

[1] In anticipation of Buller's second attempt which commenced four days later.

Colonials, killing four and wounding two, and driving back the rest in confusion.[1] Having thus penetrated Royston's picquet line, the Boers pushed on and by 4.30 a.m. had reached the eastern edge of Cæsar's Camp, striking it a little to the rear of the ordinary picquet line of the Manchesters. From this point they were enabled to open a deadly enfilading fire on the left section of No. 5 picquet, and within half an hour nearly the whole of these brave men were lying dead or wounded. Some were shot in the back as they leant forward to fire on the enemy in their front, and were afterwards found facing down hill, their heads drooping forward, and their arms outstretched. They had been extended in twos and threes along the edge, and group after group was picked off as the enemy slowly made good their ground, and creeping up and along the crest gradually occupied the now defenceless fringe of rifle-pits, rocks, and trees. By 5 a.m. the whole of the south-eastern and eastern crest was in the hands of the enemy, and the left wing of the British position was denuded of troops. Had the Boers been capable of dash and unison, and been adequately supported, they would have pressed the advantage they had won to the very utmost, and striven to seize the works of the Manchesters before reinforcements could arrive. But their comrades on the hills behind held back, and the men on the crest made no attempt to utilise their initial success. Checked by fire from the right half of No. 5, whither at 5 a.m. Colonel Curran had sent a section of C Company, they contented themselves with holding the captured positions, and so gave the defenders time to throw fresh troops upon the threatened point.

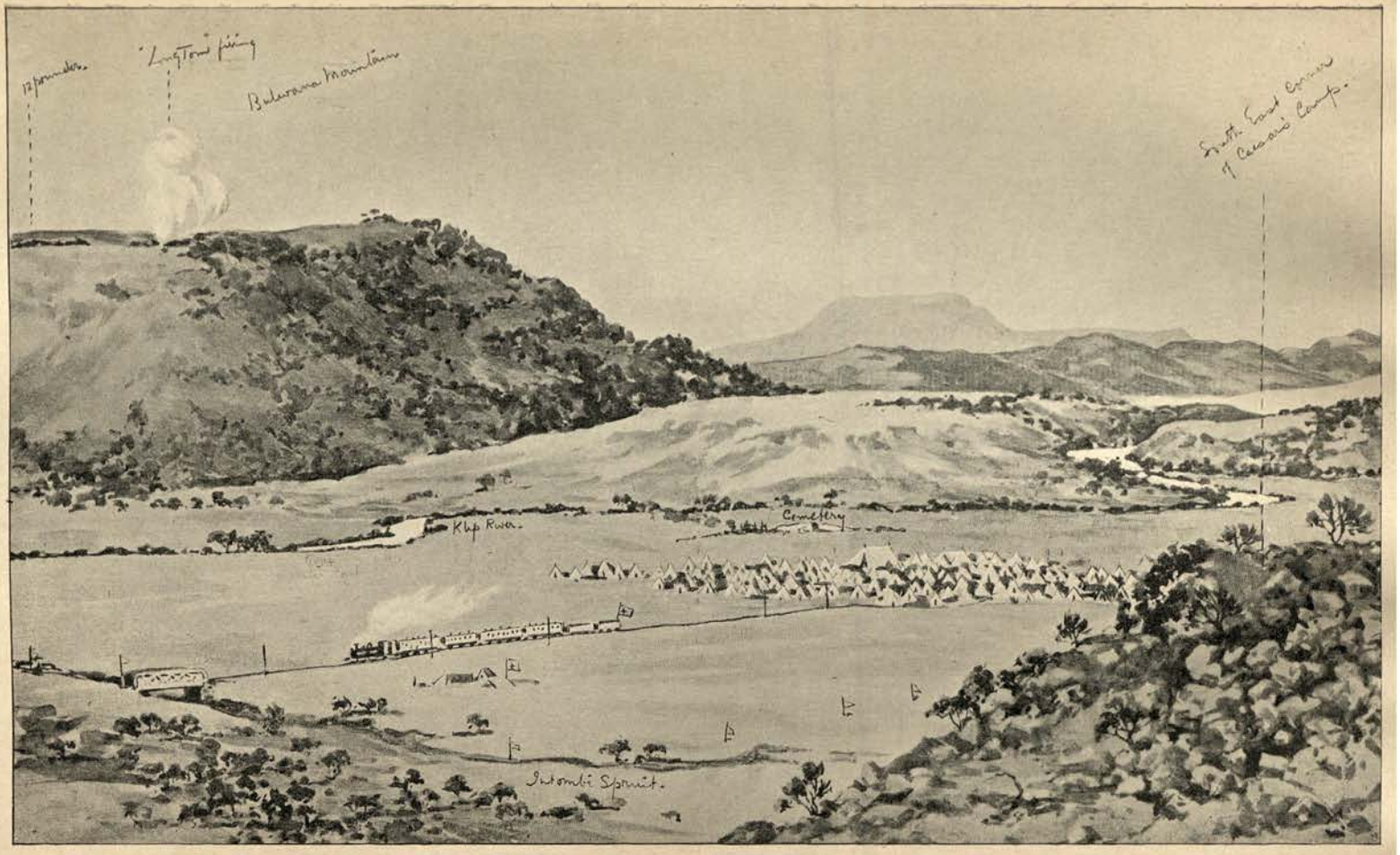
Just as the section of C company moved off to reinforce No. 5, Captain Carnegie's company of Gordons reached the Manchester camp under the northern crest, and Colonel Royston hurried forward two squadrons of Border Mounted Rifles to reinforce his picquets and regain the position lost at dawn. But at this moment little was known of the state of affairs on the eastern crest; Royston could only advance slowly, Lieutenant Hunt Grubbe of the Manchesters, who had come from the camp as guide to Carnegie, and had gone on ahead to reconnoitre, stumbled into the arms of the Boers and was captured. Carnegie

[1] Colonel Royston's section seems to have been entirely unprovided with defences.

following, gradually made his way round the north-eastern bend of the mountain in order to drive away the Boers who had effected a lodgment on the eastern edge, but the fire from the Intombi slopes was heavy, and progress was very difficult. In the meantime the Heidelbergers on the crest were being gradually reinforced from below, and other bodies of the enemy were visible behind. It was of the first importance that they should not be allowed to reach the plateau and attack our weakened left. But at 6 a.m. Carnegie's company, the only available infantry, was not in a position to check them, and Royston's volunteers were still further to the rear. At this moment, as on so many occasions in the war, the shrapnel of a British Field Battery was flung into the wavering scale with instantly decisive effect.

Amongst the various units which Sir George White [1] had set in motion was the 53rd Battery under Major Abdy. Escorted by a squadron of Border Mounted Rifles, it left camp at about half-past five o'clock, and moving quietly down through the scrub that borders the Klip, came into action near the junction of Fouries Spruit and the river, in a spot partially sheltered from the Bulwana fire by a clump of trees. From this point the parties of Boers on and below the eastern crest of Cæsar's Camp were plainly visible, stealing across a shelving plateau covered with mimosa. Upon this slope and the rocks on the sky-line above, Major Abdy now poured a hail of shrapnel. The range was only 2,200 yards; and every shell burst with deadly precision, tearing through the scrub and shattering and destroying everything that moved on the hill-side. The effect was magical. The enemy's supports melted away, those on the eastern crest suffered heavily, and those below dared not cross the shell-swept zone, and never reached their companions above. Their artillery strove in vain to silence this murderous fire. The 6″ Creusot and the lighter guns on Bulwana rained shell around the battery, the ground was ploughed with splinters, and the guns were shrouded in smoke and dust. Two shells burst under the muzzle of

[1] The General was incapacitated by illness from personally superintending his office, so that Hunter was practically in command. Several times, of course, during the day he went to tell his chief how things were going. All messages were transmitted by telephone. Question 14,545. Evidence given before Royal Commission.



THE CAMP AT INTOMBI.

No. 2; a third fell near the trail, carrying off the left arm and leg of Sergeant Bosely, and striking Gunner Pollard in the thigh. But the rate of the guns' fire was unchecked, and partially sheltered by the trees the 53rd Battery continued to make brilliant practice, its gunners methodically sweeping a space for Carnegie's Gordons, who followed fast on the very heels of the bursting shrapnel. The shells must have passed within a few feet of the heads of the infantry, but no mishap occurred, and by 9 a.m. Abdy, having effectively cleared the eastern slopes, withdrew his guns under cover. He had fired 138 rounds and lost four men wounded.

Long before Abdy had finished his work the artillery duel had become general. For several hours nearly all the available guns on both sides were in action, and the roar of the cannonade reverberating through the valleys around Grobler's Kloof startled the anxious listeners in the camp at Chieveley. The guns on Cæsar's Camp replied vigorously to the Boer fire from the southward; those on Rifleman's Ridge poured their shot on the 21st Field Battery, which was now shelling Mounted Infantry Hill, and in its turn the Naval 12-pounder on Long Hill strove to keep down the fire from Rifleman's Ridge. The 4·7″ under Lieutenant Halsey on Cove Hill opened a rapid fire on the Bulwana Creusot in the hope of diverting its attention from Abdy, but the big gun for once persevered in its task, and threw over sixty shells at the 53rd. Failing to crush the battery, it finally turned its fire on Cæsar's Camp, on whose plateau part of the Rifle Brigade could now be seen advancing.

Abdy's fire had bridged the dangerous period before the arrival of fresh infantry, and had practically isolated the Boers still remaining on the eastern crest. The advent of Colonel Metcalfe, soon after 7 a.m.,[1] placed six companies at the disposal of Colonel Curran, whom Ian Hamilton had left in command when he hurried to Waggon Hill. That officer, however, was in the firing line, and Metcalfe who was unacquainted with the ground, could find no one who was willing to take the responsibility of advising him how his battalion could best be employed. The consequence was that instead of following Carnegie's

[1] At 7 a.m. the first news of the attack was sent to Buller.

company round the north-eastern angle of the hill, a line of advance which gave good cover until close to the enemy, he sent two companies across the open plateau in the direction of No. 2 picquet, a point in the line which was never seriously threatened. Fortunately Captain Mills, whose company was the first to move, hit off the true direction in so far that he advanced on No. 4 and the right of No. 5, but the exposed nature of the ground proved fatal to himself and the success of his attack. In spite of a heavy shell fire the plateau was almost traversed when, within fifty yards of the southern crest, he was received by a tremendous fire from Boers lying unseen along the rifle-pits of No. 5 picquet line. Mills and a good many men were at once hit; the rest of the company lay down and returned the fire. Every cartridge was expended, and the wounded suffered terribly from thirst. Close in front, behind a small sangar, lay three dead Manchesters, the only Englishmen visible. No firing could be heard but that of the Boers, and the slightest movement drew a hail of bullets. Of several messengers sent to beg for reinforcements only one got through safely. No reserves were available, and so, with its captain mortally wounded and a third of its numbers killed or injured, the company lay on the almost coverless plateau, enfiladed from the left and exposed to a heavy fire in front for nine long hours.

D Company, under Captain Biddulph, which had advanced in support of Mills, fared little better. Inclining to the left, it had got within 150 yards of the crest-line, and 300 of the left rear of the foremost company, when it was received by a heavy fire and compelled to lie down. So placed it covered, apparently without being aware of it, the left flank of Mills, and remained in the same position until the end of the fight. The two companies of Riflemen covered practically the same space as the ill-fated left half of No. 5 picquet, and suffered greatly from the enfilading fire from the south-eastern angle of the hill. Mills himself was hit when within 100 yards of the adjutant of the Manchester Regiment, who was with the remaining half of No. 5 picquet, but its proximity was not discovered until late in the day. To the advance across the bare summit were due most of the casualties in the Rifle Brigade, and although the movement undoubtedly helped

to divert the enemy's fire from the Manchester picquet line, it was a costly mistake.

Meanwhile, Carnegie, aided by Abdy's shrapnel, had advanced by half-company rushes towards the most eastern point of the plateau. Here the Boers still fought tenaciously, but at 9.45 the Gordons carried a low sangar in brilliant style, and rescued Hunt Grubbe, who received an English bullet through his cap as he lay amongst his captors. At this point, however, the progress of the Highlanders was stayed. Twelve men were down and their captain was severely wounded. Amongst the rocks and trees of the south-eastern promontory the enemy lay in considerable numbers, and their fire was so hot that, like the Riflemen extended on their right, Carnegie's Company was brought to a standstill. By 10 a.m., however, Colonel Curran returned to the northern edge and took the business in hand. Realising the first error of direction, he pushed the remaining companies of the Rifle Brigade up in rear of Carnegie, three of them round the north-eastern shoulder, although Stephens' company, which was leading, took a more direct and more exposed line than the Gordons. But so heavy was the fire that neither Stephens nor Thesiger, Gough nor Hamilton could win an inch beyond the point already seized by Carnegie. Crowded on the eastern slopes and amongst the rocks on the skyline, the different companies lay jumbled up, in some places eight deep, so that very few could fire. But they had fair cover and were only exposed to fire from the low ground towards Intombi, where the Natal Volunteers were still heavily engaged. Various attempts were made to get forward, and several of the officers were hit, but no ground was gained for some hours. About midday two and a half more companies of Gordons [1] were thrown into the fight at the same point, but they only helped to increase the congestion, and remained lying on the hill-side until the moment of the final advance. Not until 3 p.m. did Colonel Curran learn from an officer of the Gordons that troops were already too thick in this part of the field. Had the position been realised earlier, it might perhaps have been more advisable to reinforce the Natal Volunteers in the low ground with some of the unengaged infantry. As it was, Colonel Royston's irregulars

[1] Four companies had reached Cæsar's Camp at 11.30 a.m.

could do little more than prevent the enemy pushing in between the river and the hill. A few of the Natal Mounted Rifles were with the Gordons; the first squadron of the Border Mounted Rifles was in the firing line all day; the third squadron watched the Klip river dongas; the others acted as escort to the 53rd Battery, and had two men wounded by the shell fire. The Natal Carbineers had only one troop engaged.[1] Towards the afternoon, as elsewhere, the fight slackened, and many of the Boers in rear took the opportunity to bathe in the Klip. Had regular troops been at hand to support Royston, it is possible that he might have fought his way up to the position held by his picquets in the morning, and brought a flanking attack to bear on the enemy higher up the hill.

As things turned out, it is clear that in the first place Colonel Curran would have done better to remain at his own headquarters instead of going into the firing line. It is only fair, however, to say that when he went up to the picquet line he did not know that the Rifle Brigade were being sent to reinforce him, and had not himself asked for any reinforcements. The general impression at the moment was that the firing was an affair of outposts, such as had occurred before. Colonel Curran, however, went up to see for himself what was happening, and remained in front until the crisis of the fight was over. Having satisfied himself of this he returned to the northern edge, where it appears that he for the first time learnt that the Rifle Brigade had been sent by order of Sir George White, and that two of its companies were engaged on the open plateau. It may be added that signalling communication between the picquet line and the Manchester headquarters was not well performed, largely, no doubt, owing to the heaviness of the fire. Possibly this was one reason why the over-crowding on the eastern slope was not discovered sooner. Another was the roughness of the ground, and the fact that none of the Gordon or Rifle Brigade officers were acquainted with it. In spite, however, of these faults of execution, the left Boer attack had by midday been fairly mastered. Only along the south-eastern edge of the hill, where

[1] Major-General Hunter intended, if the worst came to the worst, to try and get his General out of Ladysmith, using the Carbineers as escort. (14,546).

they were shielded from the fire of our artillery and supported by their own gun and rifle fire from the kopjes above Fouries Spruit, from Flat Top Hill, Middle Hill and the Intombi scrub, did the enemy still retain their hold. Gradually the firing, as on Waggon Hill, dwindled away, and at 12.45 Sir George White signalled to Buller: "Have beaten enemy off at present, but they are still round me in great numbers, especially to south, and I think renewed attack very probable." But so far as Cæsar's Camp was concerned, he was mistaken. The masses of clouds, which during the last hours of the day prevented any message being sent, were now gathering in the south and broke with extreme violence at 3.30 p.m. In half an hour the dry spruit beds of the morning had become raging torrents, and the 13th Battery, standing in reserve on the road leading out of Ladysmith, was knee-deep in water. This tremendous tempest gave the Boers on Cæsar's Camp an opportunity to retire. For a short time their musketry again became active, and the rifles on both sides flashed brightly through the gloom. So sudden was the outbreak that the watchers below supposed that a fresh attack was in progress, but nothing was further from the enemy's minds. Since 10 a.m. they had felt that the struggle was hopeless, and were only waiting for a chance to get safely away. Captain Crichton's half company of Manchester Mounted Infantry, which Colonel Curran now sent forward through the ranks of the Rifle Brigade, occupied the south-eastern angle with little difficulty; about 5.30 p.m., as the storm cleared, the Gordons began to advance along the eastern slope, and Mills and Biddulph's gallant Riflemen springing at last to their feet, ran to the southern crest. For some time the enemy had been dribbling rearward, and now those that still clung to the hill slopes rushed in a panic into the valley. The reserves, who all day long had shirked the risks of the stormers, hurried out of the dongas near Fouries Spruit and fled confusedly towards the swollen stream. Then it was that they paid the penalty of defeat. The weary infantrymen leant forward and emptied their last cartridge into the fliers as they hurried across the open. The range was under 1,000 yards, and along the spruit banks as they hesitated to cross the torrent men and horses fell fast. Some were drowned; others, crossing safely, came under the shrapnel of the 42nd Battery as

they fled for shelter to the further slopes and ridges. So stiffly had the enemy fought that they did not quit their last hold of the south-eastern edge till half-past five, nor did the rifle fire that followed their retreat die down until 7 o'clock. The night was so dark that it was difficult to find the wounded, and the troops lay down in the positions in which they fought, utterly exhausted by the prolonged strain, which in the case of the Manchesters had lasted sixteen hours.

Meanwhile the right horn of Bester's Ridge had been the scene of a yet more desperate combat. There, too, the enemy surprised the defenders.[1] Men remembered afterwards having heard about midnight the sound of a hymn proceeding from the Boer lines, but the warning went unregarded. At 1 a.m. a party of thirteen blue-jackets and thirty engineers, under Lieutenant Digby Jones, and half a company of Gordons commenced dragging the waggons containing the platform of the 4·7″ gun and the necessary tools up Waggon Point. Some time elapsed before this was accomplished, and unloading had hardly commenced when the surrounding rocks were spattered with bullets. The attacking columns of Free Staters had reached the nek between Waggon Point and Waggon Hill, destroying the Imperial Light Horse picquet in the gully beneath on their way. The Highlanders ran for their arms; Digby-Jones formed up his sappers behind the gun-pits. Lieutenant Macnaghten, commanding the working party of the Highlanders, collected as many of his men as the darkness and confusion permitted, and pushed out on to the nek. But the hill was alive with musketry, the small band suffered heavily as it advanced and became mingled with the Boers. Uncertain of the position of friend or foe the survivors with only three men unwounded were forced to surrender.[2]

Meanwhile on the "Point" itself the squadron of Imperial Light Horse, under Captain Richardson, instinctively turned in the direction where the fire proceeded, and lined the south-eastern flank of the knoll, unwittingly placing themselves in the darkness within a few yards of

[1] Captain Richardson of the 11th Hussars and a sergeant actually reconnoitred Middle Hill during the night and examined the enemy's gun-pits; but did not notice the hostile concentration then in progress in Bester's Valley.

[2] They were rescued later in the day.

the Boers on the nek. As the growing light disclosed their positions they came under a hail of bullets which almost annihilated them. The position of the Light Horsemen on the eastern side of the nek was nearly as bad. Upon them in the dark hours the first brunt of the attack had fallen, and it was in the encounter with their picquet that had burst forth the hasty volley that had alarmed the party on the "Point." The Hotchkiss, after firing a few rounds into the darkness, was only saved from capture by Lieutenant Matthias, who got it withdrawn on to the northern slope; and the rising wave of attack, flashing into points of fire, threatened to submerge the whole of the British position. Constantly reinforced by way of the gully below the nek, and protected by a ledge of rock that ran across the gorge, the enemy fired in all directions, raking Waggon Point, Waggon Hill, and the hollow between. Under heavy losses—for their figures were visible against the brightening sky—Matthias and his Light Horsemen withdrew to a rough sangar east of the nek near the top of Waggon Hill; to their left were the three companies of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, now heavily engaged with the Boers who had obtained a lodgment on the crest. The men on Waggon Point were too hard pressed to render any assistance, and would have been isolated if the enemy had gained possession of the nek.

The key of the position was in the hands of the Light Horsemen, and about 20 infantrymen who had come up in support. The burghers, securely ensconced amongst the rocks of the southern crest and the ledge across the nek, kept up a fire that grew hotter and hotter as day advanced and slew all that could not find cover. But the survivors were equal to their task. Opening a heavy fire upon the hollow, they were able temporarily to check the enemy, while on the left the King's Royal Rifle Corps, in their sangar, poured a rapid fusillade diagonally across the plateau of Waggon Hill, and succeeded in confining their opponents to the southern edge. On Waggon Point also the first violence of the assault had been stayed. The few remaining men under Richardson fought doggedly on, and an attempt to turn the extreme end of the hill had been frustrated by the working party. Sadly thinned, the British held throughout the rearward edge

of the crest-line, though hard put to it to maintain themselves and quite unable to drive the enemy off the hill. For hours at the shortest possible range the fight raged amongst the rocks and boulders, neither side losing or gaining an inch. No charge was attempted, for the Boers, as at Cæsar's Camp, trusted wholly to their rifle fire, and the British were too few and too scattered for such an effort. The Light Horse fought with a stubbornness that eclipsed the dashing courage they had shown at Elandslaagte and Gun Hill. Surprised, outnumbered, and with scarcely a score of sound men left, they clung to their sangar with a resolute tenacity which the strain of long-continued combat could not shake. Their fire, incessant and deadly, brought the attack to a standstill in the dangerous moments before the dawn, while reserves were yet far off and the courage of the enemy unbroken. It was in vain that the burghers crowded the southern slopes and strove to press on over the crest. The boldest fell, the timid took cover; none could venture upon the fatal plateau: and when shortly after sunrise supports began to arrive, the Boers were still on their own side of the ridge. At this moment the defenders of Waggon Hill and Waggon Hill Point probably numbered about 350 sound men,[1] scattered over a full mile of broken hill. The number of Boers who originally climbed the hill was only 253,[2] but had the hundreds then lingering in the southern spruits reinforced the men on the southern crest we should probably have lost the position. Over-confident or over-timid, they let the precious moment slip; the British reserves began to come up, and the first, and most dangerous, crisis of that perilous day was safely passed.

Colonel Hamilton had left his quarters on Cæsar's Camp soon after

[1] At the commencement—

130 Imperial Light Horse.
30 Sappers.
40 Gordons.
300 1st 60th.
10 Naval Brigade.

510 in all.

[2] Journal of the United Service Institution. "Reminiscences of a Free State Burgher." It is, however, probable that this total is somewhat of an underestimate.

the attack had begun, and judging that Waggon Hill was the point most seriously threatened, came thither himself, leaving word for two companies of Highlanders to follow him. Hurrying to Waggon Point these troops succeeded in partially driving back the Boers in front of Richardson, but in endeavouring to turn the south-western end of the hill so as to take the enemy in flank, they themselves were enfiladed from Mounted Infantry Hill and Bester's Valley and could make no way. Meanwhile Sir George White had directed the 21st Battery under Major Blewitt, escorted by the 5th Dragoon Guards, to move out by Range Post and endeavour to prevent reinforcements reaching the enemy from the west. The appearance of the battery at 5.45 a.m. was saluted by a rain of shells from the Boer artillery. Two 4·7″ howitzers, a pompom, a 12-pounder, and the 6″ from Telegraph Hill were in action against Bester's Ridge from the south and west; and Waggon Hill, from its exposed position, was swept from end to end, though the reverse slopes and rocks made the shell fire deterrent rather than destructive. The Battery itself on the open ground beyond Range Post lost eleven horses and three men wounded. To these guns, and to the rifle fire from Mounted Infantry Hill, it replied effectively, considerably lessening the violence of the fusillade and preventing the Boer reserves from reinforcing their firing line.[1] Yet in spite of this and the advance of two companies of the 1st King's Royal Rifles on Waggon Point at 8 a.m., no ground could be gained in that part of the field. On Waggon Hill, however, where an hour earlier six companies of the 1st and 2nd battalions of the same corps had arrived, Colonel Hamilton determined to attempt a charge against the Boers on the southern edge. Major Mackworth and Major Bowen fell in abortive efforts to reach the enemy. Then Lieutenant Tod led his company forward. Ere he had gone ten yards he fell dead, seven of the men immediately following were hit, and the rest shrank back unable to face the fire. Again the indecisive rifle duel was resumed. The remaining squadrons of Light Horse, who, at Sir George's command, had come in hot haste from Ladysmith and had been in the hottest of the fire since 5.10 a.m., were

[1] At 8.10 a.m., the cannonade having slackened, the 21st retired out of action to the lower ground, where Major Gore had two squadrons of his regiment in support.

now suffering heavily. Major Doveton, whose squadron had moved up to support the King's Royal Rifles on the left was mortally wounded; in reinforcing Matthias Colonel Edwardes and Major Karri Davis were hit, Lieutenants Pakeman and Campbell killed, and Lord Ava mortally injured. Soon after Captain Codrington fell, wounded in an attempt to charge.

Nevertheless though every effort to come to hand grips with the enemy collapsed under the deadly fire, the riflemen held on doggedly and lost not an inch of ground. Separated by only a few yards neither side risked a movement; so that, at 10 a.m., seeing that no progress was being made, the British General sent forward the 18th Hussars, who were retained as a dismounted reserve at the base of the hill.[1]

The field of battle about this time presented a strange scene. Scarcely a man was visible along the crest except here and there where the dead lay in the open, struck down before they could gain cover. On both sides of the contested position ambulances were at work, streams of wounded pouring northward and southward. On the flanks of Waggon Hill shells were bursting, scattering bullets and splinters far to the rear. The boom of guns was incessant, and the rolling of the musketry was "like the roar of a forest fire." On the topmost crest of Waggon Point stood the two waggons bearing the gun materials; some of their teams lying dead, the others cropping the short herbage unmindful of the shot that was flying past them. Nowhere were the opposing lines more than 300 yards apart, but nothing moved on the deserted crest, and no one dared rise to his feet along its edges.[2] The Boers, without reinforcements to carry them forward, fired on, despairingly; the British, despite their reinforcements, could not drive them away. Both sides were sorely exhausted, and about midday the fighting considerably slackened. Gradually the Boers withdrew below the crest line, "except at a single point, where they were favoured by excellent cover, with a flat open space in front of it."

[1] At 9.30 a.m. the following message was sent to Buller: "Attack continues and enemy been reinforced from south. All my reserves are in action. I think enemy must have weakened his force in front of you."

[2] In some cases the combatants were so close to each other that they exchanged remarks as well as bullets.

The violence of the attack seemed broken, and all along the ridge the numbers of the enemy had diminished, when about one o'clock, or fifteen minutes after the despatch of White's 12.45 p.m. message, the dropping rifle fire suddenly redoubled on the extreme end of Waggon Point, and the line of Gordons and Rifles was seen to recoil in confusion. Still resolute to win, Japie De Villiers and Van Wyk, followed by a few of their comrades, had crept up close under the summit boulders, and made a sudden rush at the gun-pits.

At this moment Colonel Hamilton, who had just decided to clear the hill with a final counter-attack, was with Miller-Walnutt on the inner slope of the "Point," behind the men of various units who were lining the crest. Startled by the unexpected appearance of the enemy, the tired troops gave way and bolted down the hill, regardless of the appeals of their officers. Luckily Digby-Jones' sappers, who had been relieved at noon by the Gordons, were still in hand, and together with a few Light Horsemen who followed Hamilton, dashed upwards towards the gun-pits. Van Wyk and De Villiers had already reached the emplacements and other Boers were close behind, when the British officers and Albrecht, of the Light Horse, appeared on the summit. The Boers who were following gave back, but their brave leaders stood fast. A hasty snapping of rifle and revolver and five out of the six men had fallen dead, Digby-Jones, Miller-Walnutt, and Albrecht, for the defenders, De Villiers and Van Wyk for the assailants. For a moment Hamilton must have been the only man standing alive on the top. But before the remaining Boers had summoned up resolution to seize the ground their leaders had died to win, the British had regained it. The Sappers were close behind their devoted officer, the infantry rallied, the mingled mass of Highlanders, Light Horse, and sailors, supported by some of the 18th Hussars whom Colonel Knox had sent forward when he saw the infantry give way, hurried back; a reserve company of King's Royal Rifles came up, and Waggon Point was safe.

This second attack was succeeded by a lull of several hours during which the great storm broke. It was becoming evident to those on the hill that the force of the attack was spent, but it was not so clear to the unengaged troops below, who had watched the swaying

combat for nine long hours, or to the anxious staff who knew that the available reserves were exhausted. At 3.15 p.m. the message, "Attack renewed. Very hard pressed," was signalled to Buller, a striking indication to the uncertainty of the situation and the heart-sickening anxiety of those responsible for the safety of the town. The fears of the spectators seemed about to be realised when in the gloom of the storm the roar of the musketry burst out again in unexampled volume. The wind, which up to this point had blown in the face of the assailants, changed to the south; and impelled by the favouring blast they made a last effort to win the hill. Again the outburst of fire shook the half-blinded infantry on the Point. Again the situation was saved by the vigour of the officers. Lieutenant Reade, of the King's Royal Rifles, rallied his own men, Major Rice pushed forward the remains of his Sappers, the Gordons charged with the bayonet, and once more in the darkness of the tempest the defenders regained the summit.[1]

Meanwhile the combat had continued upon Waggon Hill, the Boer sharpshooters still clinging obstinately to the little ridge of rocks with the flat plateau in front. This party only numbered about fifty picked shots, but the utmost efforts of Colonel Hamilton, whose infantry now encircled them with a converging fire, had failed to dislodge them.[2] The only way was to rush them with the bayonet, but the troops on the hill no longer possessed the necessary freshness and cohesion for such a charge. At length, when the storm was at its height, Hamilton determined to throw his last infantry reserve into the scale against them. It consisted of three companies of the Devon regiment, the only ones which the threatening attitude of the enemy on the north of the town had left unemployed. At Colonel Knox's suggestion Sir George White had ordered them to march to Hamilton's assistance. Major Park left camp at 4 p.m.; an hour later he reported himself to Hamilton, who asked him if he could turn the enemy out. He replied that he would try. The three companies, commanded by

[1] An additional reinforcement of two squadrons of dismounted dragoons which had been called up from Range Post at 10 a.m. lined the inner crest after 5 p.m., but they did not fire, and had only one man wounded.

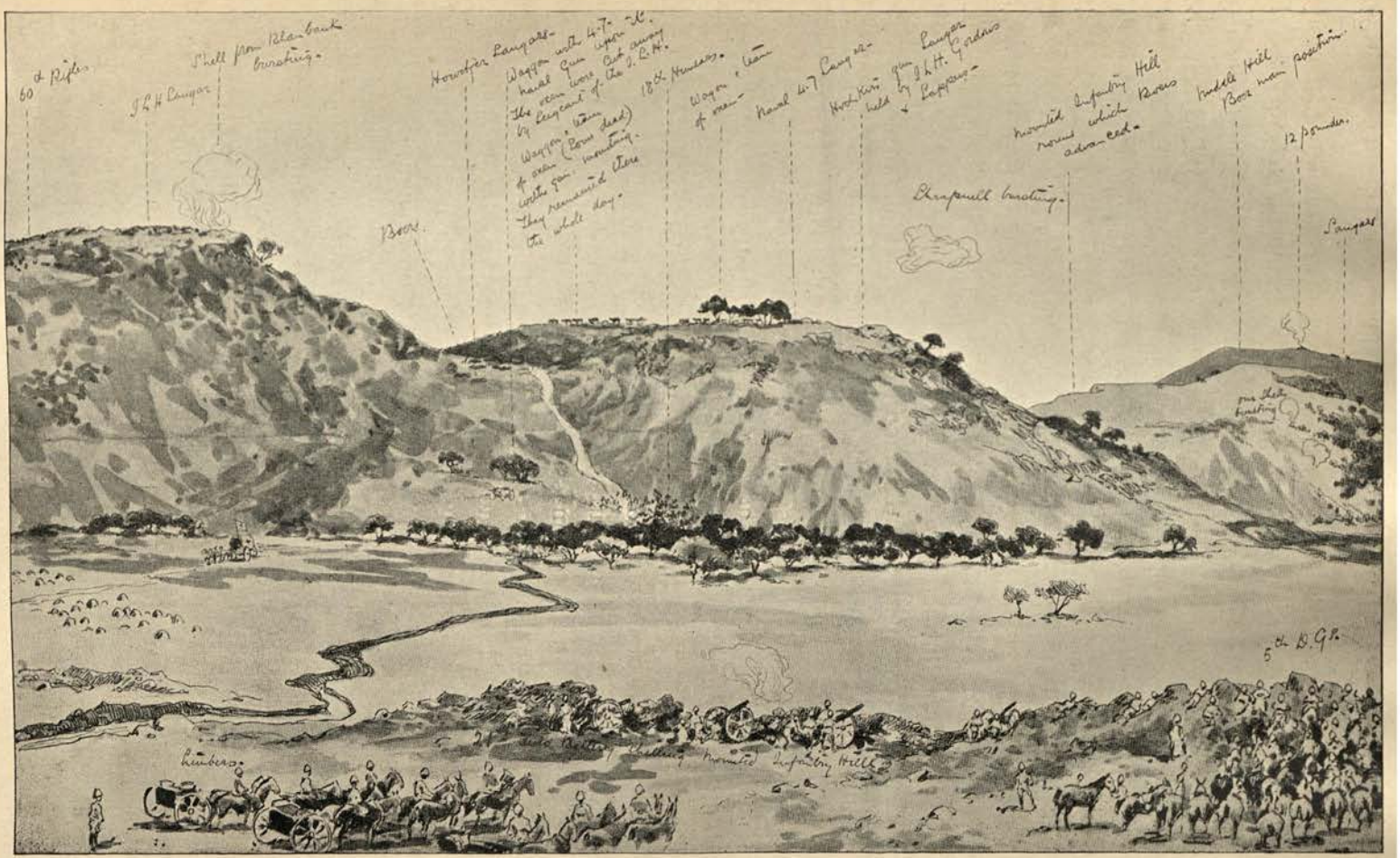
[2] These men were fighting "for the dark," and probably would have retired during the night. But it was not a time to trust to such a chance. They might equally have been reinforced.

Lafone, Field, Masterson and Walker, and numbering about 180 bayonets, formed line in a slight hollow just below the main rim of the hill, between the main sangar of the King's Royal Rifles and the slight knoll above the nek which was still held by the indomitable Light Horse. Each company received its orders, bayonets were fixed and magazines charged, and with a word of encouragement from Hamilton the Devons dashed upwards. For the first few yards they were under cover, but when the top of the crest line was reached they were met by a furious fire, the noise of which, in the words of one who was present, resembled the crackle of burning brushwood. Then for the first time they saw what had to be done. Right in front was the little ridge of rocks held by the Boers, and between them and it extended 130 yards of open flat grass without the smallest cover or shelter. Across this, without a waver, the Devons, led on by their Major, rushed at the top of their speed. Men fell fast, but the rapidity of the charge was unchecked; the firing grew wilder as the bayonets came nearer, and at length, when barely fifteen yards separated them from the advancing line of steel, the Boers sprang up and fled down the hill.[1]

The fight was not yet over. Scarcely had the Devons occupied the enemy's rocks than they found themselves under a heavy cross fire from both flanks. Lafone at this moment remarking that he wished that some one would tell the Light Horse to fire at the Boers on their left front, Lieutenant Masterson ran back across the open, and though three times hit in the thighs staggered on and gave his message.[2] Lafone was now the only officer left to his Colonel, for Walker had fallen in the charge, Field was already lying dead beside the rocks, and Captain Menzies, who with a few men of the Manchester Regiment had supported the left of the Devons, was wounded. Almost immediately after this Lafone was shot through the brain, and Park was alone with his three shattered companies. Soaked with rain and shivering with cold the men held on to the rocks they had won, firing occasionally into the obscurity until night put an end to the

[1] Compare, however, the account in Appendix D II.

[2] For this conspicuous act of valour he received the Victoria Cross.


Waggon Hill.
Waggon Hill West.
60th Rifles.
Shell from Blaubank bursting.
I.L.H. Lancers.
Howitzer Lancers.
Waggon with 4·7" howitzer gun upon it.
Waggon with 4·7" howitzer gun upon it. The actual gun upon it was cut away by Sergeant of the I.L.H.
Waggon & team of oxen (Oxen dead) with gun mounting. They remained there the whole day.
18th Hussars.
Waggon & team of oxen.
Naval 4·7 Lancers.
Hart-Kirk gun Lancers held by I.L.H. Gordons & Lancers.
Boers.
Shrapnell bursting.
Mounted Infantry Hill
Mounted Infantry which Boers advanced.
Puddle Hill Boer main position.
12 pounder.
Lancers
5th D.G.R.
Limbers.
Mounted Infantry Hill

GENERAL VIEW ON WAGGON HILL ON JANUARY 6TH.

conflict. With a last futile outburst of fire the Boers broke and fled from the lower slopes, the British musketry blazed out for the last time upon the retreating enemy; the effulgent crest of the hill grew dark and silent, and the most momentous struggle that the British arms had known since Inkerman was victoriously ended.

The events of this combat, in some ways the most brilliant and desperate in the history of the South African War, a fight creditable alike to Englishman and to Boer, are strikingly illustrative of the peculiarities of both armies. The Boer dispositions are those of Spion Kop and Majuba; a chosen body of men in the firing line supported and covered by the continuous heavy fire of larger masses behind. But the difference of ground and the fact that we, and not the enemy, held the flanking hills deprived the Boers of the advantages they enjoyed on Spion Kop and in some measure gave them over to the British. The enemy attacked a vast salient, and in so doing they exposed their own flanks and reserves to the fire of the British artillery. The horns of the great concave hill were too far apart for the force engaged on the one to assist that attacking the other, and the very extent of the British position—an extent so great that it was for a time a danger to the weak garrison—permitted our troops to develop the necessary breadth of front, while the massive shoulders of the hill gave a cover for the reserves and largely neutralised the action of the Boer guns.

Left unsupported by their comrades,[1] and aided only by the insufficient substitute of long-range fire, the Boer storming parties struggled gallantly for victory, but with that unwillingness to risk life which was the fatal weakness of their system, they hesitated to use the immense initial advantages accruing from the night attack, and in contenting themselves with the occupation of the southern rim of the plateau only, allowed the British time to recover from the first confusion, to strengthen their defensive line upon the northern edge and to bring up reserves. Their later efforts to gain ground, striking as was the individual bravery of their leaders, were spasmodic and ill-supported. It was obvious that the tenure of the south side alone was not enough to secure victory; it was essential that our second

[1] Probably there were about 1,000 Boers on the hill at one time or another.

line of defence should be carried without a moment's delay; and the primary cause of the Boer defeat was the failure to reach the second line of our sangars in the first hours of the fight. From the moment when Miller-Walnutt pushed his Highlanders on to Waggon Point and Carnegie led his company along the eastern edge of Cæsar's Camp the tide began to turn. The 53rd and 21st Batteries stopped the advance of the Boer reserves,[1] those of the British began to arrive, and the first imminent danger was averted. Later on De Villiers threw his life away in vain because his men would not follow him, and the last attack in the storm after a vehement beginning died away in face of a resolute resistance.

Throughout the day the attacks and counter-attacks were fairly divided between the two sides, the defenders showing on the whole more dash than the assailants. This was only to be expected, seeing that the former were highly drilled infantry armed with the bayonet, the latter irregulars without it. While the Boer offensive tactics consisted in occupying a well-sheltered position close to the opposing line and trusting to the rifle for victory, the British relied in the last resort on a resolute home charge with the bayonet, and the cold steel conquered by the moral strength with which it endows its wielder and the terror it instils into his opponent. It was shown that really good troops thus armed and boldly led can storm a position in the face of magazine fire if the distance be not too great, the units intact and the men fresh. Such were the conditions under which the Devons charged, and the dread of the steel alone effected what many hours of furious rifle fire had failed to accomplish. In face of the experiences in Natal, it is idle to regard the bayonet as antiquated. Elandslaagte, the sorties of December, the fights on Bester's Ridge, the last day at Pieter's Hill are alone sufficient to prove the lasting value of a weapon whose utility, though modified by present conditions, is based upon the permanent facts of human nature.

Yet, although the importance of the bayonet was amply demonstrated on Waggon Hill, the enormously greater power of the rifle

[1] Botha's force only arrived at 4 p.m. and took no part in the attack.

as the primary weapon of the soldier was also decisively established. The defence and attack of Bester's Ridge consisted mainly of a desperate fire-duel at ranges varying from thirty to six hundred yards, the scattered formation of both sides in the earlier stages of the action militating against the cohesion and impetus necessary for a home charge. This combination of shock and skirmish tactics is no new thing. Napier, one of the greatest military historians of the century, a man who thoroughly grasped the actualities of war and the moral forces of battle, and whose profound belief in the bayonet made him regret the introduction of long-range fire-arms as likely to give less scope to that favourite weapon of British infantry, wrote in 1859, commenting on the volunteer movement:—

". . . the art of hiding behind trees and bushes, rocks, sticks, and stones, is the very essence of modern warfare. The teaching regular soldiers how to move in masses is an absolutely necessary foundation to support the superstructure of real warfare, which is, in fact, this very hiding behind sticks and stones. A great deal is said about bayonet charges and solid onsets of heavy columns, but much less of that takes place than is supposed by men who only read of war; three-fourths of every battle between regular armies depend upon the stick and stone practice, and the whole of a battle as between volunteer rifle corps and regular troops will depend upon the former's skill in hiding."

The preparations for the defence of Bester's Ridge have been severely criticised. The charges fall under two heads; first, that the defences were of themselves inadequate; secondly, that they were badly placed. While there is good reason to think that there is some truth in these criticisms, two facts must give us pause before we subscribe to the wholesale condemnation of newspaper correspondents. In the first place, Colonel Ian Hamilton's unquestioned ability is of itself an argument against culpable carelessness or radical errors of system; the second is the size and exposed nature of the position he had to defend, and the smallness of the available garrison. It is clear that to make the position safe 2,000 men at least were required, whereas only half that number were permanently employed

upon it. Without wishing to dogmatise on a purely technical point, we cannot help thinking that more troops might have been spared from the northern front. In this case the responsibility rests with Sir George White. The difficulties of distribution were certainly very great, for the line to be held was very long and the available troops were few ; but from Colonel Hamilton's point of view it was certainly unfortunate that more men were not given him, for, quite apart from the question of fortification, the nature of the ground made his position less defensible than the others. The western end of Waggon Hill was peculiarly exposed to gun and rifle fire, and the main ridge itself, as far as can be judged from photographs and maps, afforded no points from which small forces could command the approaches effectively and safely. The breadth of the summit plateau in many places, and its exposure to fire, increased the difficulty of devising a scheme of defence suitable to the capacity of the garrison. The eastern flank was partially covered by Colonel Royston's men, but their fire could not be brought to bear upon Bester's Valley or assist, except indirectly, the repulse of an attack upon the long southern face of the hill.

The passing of a final judgment on Colonel Hamilton's system requires a much more accurate knowledge of the ground than the maps at present available supply, for it is upon this factor that the comparative importance of the alternatives which he had to weigh depends. The following facts may, however, be taken as approximately true. He had to defend a ridge some 5,000 yards long, the top of which was flat and stony and varied from 800 to 100 yards in breadth. From the edges of this plateau the ground fell steeply, in some parts precipitously, so that no one not actually on the edges could command the slopes or the valleys adjoining.

The question to be decided was, what was to be the position of the main line of defence? On the northern or rearward edge, or the southern one facing the enemy ?

On Cæsar's Camp, the only portion of the hill that was properly guarded, Colonel Hamilton chose the latter as a line of primary resistance, so as if possible to prevent an attack from gaining footing on the hill at all. Still, however, he regarded the large sangars on the northern

side as the main line of defence. The strength of these was never tested by assault, but there is not the least reason to believe that in the daytime the enemy could ever have taken them, at any rate, by a frontal attack. Their preparation was justified by the necessity of sheltering the garrison from shell-fire, and for this purpose they were thoroughly adequate. Probably the general arrangement of the two lines of defence was the only one possible, but it had two disadvantages. First, should it become necessary to reinforce the first line, all the reinforcements, except at the eastern end, would have to move over the exposed plateau; secondly, the fire from the sangars could not drive the enemy off the hill if he effected a lodgment on the southern edge. Fortunately, the first line, owing to the hour at which the attack was made, was double its ordinary strength, and was able to keep the Boers at bay excepting on the left, where it was possible for fresh troops to creep round under cover of the shoulder. Had the other picquets been similarly overwhelmed, the task of recapturing the southern edge would have been extremely difficult, as the two companies of the Rifle Brigade who crossed the open flat found to their cost. But as long as the southern edge was held, the advance of reinforcements in extended order need not have proved costly. It has been suggested that covered ways should have been dug to connect the sangars with the picquets. Owing to want of men and implements and the nature of the ground, this was practically impossible. At the depth of a few inches the pick struck on solid rock, and the distances which it would have been necessary to cut varied from 500 yards to over half a mile. During the day shell-fire would have seriously interfered with working parties, which, moreover, would have had to consist of men just returned from guarding the picquet line. As it was, the sangar building and pit-digging, which was carried on at night, occupied weeks, and by the time the various works were completed, most of the available tools were broken, and most of the men were unfit for extra work. Even if a covered way had been made, its moral effect on the men in the picquet line would have been bad as tending to precipitate a retirement.[1]

[1] After January 6th a covered way was cut by the Engineers; but, owing to the impracticable nature of the ground, never properly finished. It was never used by the troops.

On Waggon Hill the case was different. This part of Bester's Ridge was not originally included in the scheme of defence. It was something of an offshoot from the main line; nor would its loss have exposed Ladysmith to the view and fire of the enemy, as would that of Cæsar's Camp. On the other hand, seeing that its occupation by the Boers would seriously have endangered the last-named position, it must be regarded as having possessed as great, if not so direct, an importance. On it, with the exception of the gun-pits, a few rifle-pits, and a length of low wall, there were no defences at all; indeed the only real cover consisted of the boulders with which the hill was plentifully strewn.

It would appear that in the first instance its tactical importance was undervalued, and that when it was finally occupied its fortification was neglected, For this last omission Colonel Ian Hamilton must accept the responsibility. For three weeks before the attack he had an outpost on it, and there was consequently time to strengthen it in some degree. It is impossible, therefore, wholly to subscribe to the opening sentence of Sir George White's eulogy, however heartily we may endorse the others. "I cannot speak too highly of his indefatigable zeal in organising the defence of his front, and in keeping up the hearts of all under him by his constant and personal supervision. His leadership on the 6th of January was the most marked factor in the success of the defence." [1]

Of decisive importance was one factor comparatively unknown in the days of Crawfurd and Picton, namely, the effect of artillery upon distant troops. This stopping power was admirably displayed by the British batteries behind the flanks of the infantry, and was, perhaps, the main cause why some 5,000 Boers never made their weight properly felt, and left the attacking columns to be overpowered. At the outset they were superior to the garrison of the hill, notably on Waggon Hill and Waggon Point. The successive reinforcements brought two squadrons of Light Horse, nine companies of infantry, and about nine squadrons of cavalry to Waggon Hill, and

[1] See, however, Appendix D. I. for some notes on this question which have lately reached us. The arguments they contain must greatly modify the above judgment.

eleven companies of infantry to Cæsar's Camp. Thus at the close of the action, exclusive of losses and artillerymen, there were nearly 2,000 men on the former, and nearly 1,500 on the latter, most of which were engaged and must have greatly outnumbered the Boers, even supposing that a few smaller detachments crossed Bester's Valley and joined their firing line during the day. Good cover, the power of the magazine rifle, and the heavy losses suffered by those British units which had formed the original garrison, enabled them to hold on until sunset, when they retired in a state of demoralisation.

The British were equally exhausted. It was still uncertain whether a fresh attack would not be made, and none of the engaged corps [1] were withdrawn from the position they occupied until next day. Wet, cold, and weary, the foremost line lay on their arms while ambulance parties searched for the dead and wounded amongst the rocks and bushes. Not until the next day was well advanced was the strain of expectancy relaxed and the various corps withdrawn to their usual posts. On the following night as a renewed assault was expected, the garrison of Cæsar's Camp was reinforced by some of the 18th Hussars, and all hands were kept on outpost duty. But the dismay and demoralisation of the enemy soon became known. During the next days their artillery were silent and their search parties were out in several directions. Of their losses no reliable estimate can be given. Seventy-nine bodies were found next day within our lines and given back to them for burial, while others were doubtless removed by the enemy during the day. Hunt Grubbe counted twenty-seven dead upon the hill-top whilst he was a prisoner;[2] and the Manchesters found forty-nine on Cæsar's Camp alone. Others were found days afterwards at the foot of the hill, and many more were slain in the dongas and in the bush before and during the retreat.[3] The official Boer estimate of fifty-four killed and ninety-six wounded is therefore demonstrably

[1] Four and a half squadrons of cavalry were on Waggon Hill during the night, and assisted in the erection of sangars below the outer crest-line.

[2] Diary of the Manchester Regiment.

[3] In the Journal of the United Service Institution, the Boer losses on Waggon Hill are stated to have been 27 killed and 33 wounded out of a total of 253 stormers.

false; native reports placed the total of killed and wounded at seven hundred, and it is possible that it was as great as our own. For the enemy who were in reserve suffered considerably from our artillery, and though nowhere did they lose as rapidly as the Devons did in the bayonet-charge, yet many of their men fell by rifle fire on the hill and in the valley. The quality of those who had fallen weighed yet more heavily upon them than the actual numbers. Four field-cornets, including De Jager and De Villiers, together with many of their best fighting men, had been killed, and the loss in so peculiarly constituted a force was severely felt. The British victory saved Ladysmith in more senses than one. The great attack had so completely failed that the Boers never repeated it, and the brave garrison, which had yet to undergo two months of increasing starvation, weakness, and disease, was not required to engage in a second desperate combat when their strength might have proved less equal to the effort.

The British losses can scarcely be called heavy, when the length of the struggle, which lasted twice as long as Waterloo, is taken into consideration. The casualties amongst officers amounted to more than 10 per cent. of the whole, which were thus distributed:—

	Officers.		Men.		Total.
	Killed.	Wounded.	Killed.	Wounded.	
Cavalry	1	1	3	9	14
Natal Volunteers	1	4	6	7	18
R.A.M.C.	1	1	...	...	2
Imperial Light Horse	3	6	31	36 2 missing	78
Royal Engineers	2	...	5	...	7
1st Leicesters	...	...	...	2	2
1st Devons	3	1	25	30	59
1st King's Royal Rifles	...	...	7	15	22
1st Manchesters	...	4	33	41	78
2nd King's Royal Rifles	4	...	8	24	36
2nd Rifle Brigade	1	6	20	19	46
2nd Gordons	2	2	17	23	44
Royal Artillery	...	...	...	9	9
Royal Navy	...	...	1	1	2
	18	25	150	224	417

It will be noticed that about 55 per cent. of these occurred on Waggon Hill. The record of the heavy losses of the Imperial Light Horse both in officers and men are a fitting tribute to the bravery of that splendid corps. The three companies of the Devonshire Regiment lost about 28 per cent., and fired only twelve rounds per man. The other corps suffered considerably less,[1] the Manchesters, who were in the fighting line the whole day, losing only 12½ per cent. They expended rather under one hundred rounds per man. The fight was remarkable for the fewness of the prisoners. Only six wounded Boers were taken by the British; while all the Gordons, Manchesters, or Light Horse which the enemy had captured in the first moments of the action were abandoned when they retreated. The proportion of killed to wounded, about two to three, was very high and probably due to the closeness of the range, and to the fact that when men are lying amongst rocks and boulders the head and breast are the only parts exposed.

The attacks on the northern front of our defences yet remain to be mentioned. Weak as they were compared with those on the Platrand, they created great uncertainty at headquarters as to the points at which the closely-husbanded reserves would be of most use; and until 10 a.m., during the hours when the pressure on Hamilton was most continuous and heavy, the advance of reinforcements to his assistance was considerably delayed. Before dawn the Pretoria Commando descended from Surprise Hill and Thornhill's Kopje and, supported by a very heavy gun and rifle fire from those ridges, crept down towards the railway line threatening Observation Hill, then held by half a battalion of Devons under Major Curry. Two guns of the 69th Battery opened in reply and partly drove the enemy back; but the advanced parties of Boers had already got into dead ground, and making steady progress towards the British sangars, at 9.30 a.m. suddenly endeavoured to rush them. Here, however, there

[1] One of the greatest losses sustained during the day was that of Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, who, scarcely recovered from the hurt received at Elandslaagte, was mortally wounded just after he had crossed the Klip Bridge on his way to Cæsar's Camp. The bullet that struck him must have travelled fully 3,000 yards.

was no surprise; the leading band of Boers, about ten in number, and headed by Commandant Schute, were shot down within a few yards of the breastwork, and the rest withdrew into cover. A later attempt likewise failing, the enemy retired and contented themselves with a heavy long-range fire which lasted most of the day, and was vigorously replied to by the Naval 12-pounders which engaged the Boer guns on Surprise Hill. The enemy's losses probably numbered over thirty, those of the Devons three, two killed and one wounded. At a rather later hour the Wakkerstroom contingent made a much weaker attack upon the Liverpools' post (held earlier by the Devons) east of the Helpmakaar Road. About eighty Boers occupied a donga and were driven out by a few shells and the rifle fire of two patrols and a mounted infantry picquet. They finally withdrew under cover of the great storm.[1]

[1] Sir Archibald Hunter speaks of these attacks as "very determined." Nevertheless they appear to have been beaten off without much difficulty, partly no doubt owing to the excellence of the fortifications on the northern fronts.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST PERIOD OF THE SIEGE

CHANGE OF THE CHARACTER OF THE SIEGE AFTER JANUARY 6TH—A STRUGGLE WITH STARVATION AND DISEASE—STORES WHEN THE SIEGE COMMENCED—REQUISITIONING—EARLY PERIOD OF THE SIEGE—INCREASE OF DISEASE—REQUISITIONING OF MILCH COWS—WEEKLY SALES—SUPPLY OF FOOD AT CHRISTMAS—HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT—INADEQUATE RESOURCES—REASON OF THIS—DIFFICULTIES OF CAMP AND HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATION—FOOD SUPPLY OF THE SICK—LARCENY—WATER SUPPLY—WEAKNESS OF MEDICAL STAFF INSUPERABLE—ENORMOUS INCREASE OF SICK IN INTOMBI—COLONEL STONEMAN'S REPORT—MEASURES TAKEN—GROWING WEAKNESS OF GARRISON DURING JANUARY—THE NEW BATTALION—A SECOND LINE OF DEFENCE—SPION KOP—HORSES KILLED—CHEVRIL MANUFACTORY—THE HORSE MEAT ERA—EXHAUSTION OF THE GARRISON AND POPULATION—FOOD SUPPLY OF INDIAN CAMP-FOLLOWERS—LAST REDUCTION OF RATIONS—THE BEGINNING OF THE BOER RETREAT—NEWS OF ROBERTS—ATTEMPT TO DAM THE KLIP RIVER FRUSTRATED—THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH—ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE HISTORY OF THE WAR

WITH the repulse of the great Boer attack on January 6th ends the tale of warlike achievements which lend interest to the earlier months of the siege. Until the day of relief neither British nor Dutch undertook large aggressive operations, the former because they were rapidly becoming incapable of such enterprises, the latter because they shrank from the risks of another costly assault, and were hardly pressed to hold their ground against Buller. From the 10th of January, the day on which that general commenced the movement towards the Upper Tugela, until February 28th, when his advanced guard entered the beleaguered town, the fighting along the river, with the exception of the brief intervals between Spion Kop and Vaalkranz, and Vaalkranz and Monte Cristo, was desperate and constant. Despite the disheartening effect of the retirement upon the troops of the garrison, this heavy storm of attack was of the utmost importance to Ladysmith, for it severely taxed the Boers' power of

resistance and drew away their bolder spirits from the lines of investment. Both in a chronological and material sense January 6th marks the turn of the tide. The utmost effort of Joubert to reduce the place by direct means had failed, and before his discouraged burghers had recovered from the defeat, its consequences were close upon him. Henceforth, although the futile bombardment was continued in varying intensity, the Dutch army and its general despaired of success through active measures, and relied on starvation and disease to overcome a resistance which shell and bullet had proved unable to quell.

Monotonous and featureless as were the last fifty days of the investment they deserve a more adequate narrative than is possible here, both on account of the powers of commissariat organisation which they called forth and the exemplary patience with which soldier and civilian, men, women, and children, bore their increasing hardships. We shall only endeavour to summarise the measures that made resistance possible and to describe the successive stages of privation and sickness through which the beleaguered population passed, well aware that no mere administrative records or lists of figures can adequately picture the growing exhaustion of body and depression of mind of those who helplessly suffered, or the anxious fortitude and unwearying energy of those who devised.

It was well that the garrison possessed such a commissariat officer as Colonel Ward. By a timely concentration of stores he rendered Ladysmith capable of standing a siege, and by fine organisation, full use of every resource and careful economy he prolonged the British power of resistance to so remarkable a degree that at the end of the siege he had still thirty days' reduced rations in hand. Commencing with a supply of less than eighty days' full rations for 10,000 men, combined with whatever he could procure by purchase or requisition, he succeeded in feeding 21,000 people for 118 days. In this arduous task he was most ably assisted by his subordinates, conspicuous among whom were Colonel Stoneman and Major Morgan.

At the beginning of the siege Ladysmith contained 21,000 souls,

10,142 horses and mules, 2,500 oxen, and a few hundred sheep. The stores in hand[1] at the beginning of November were as follows:—

	lbs.
Flour	979,996
Preserved meat	173,792
Biscuits	142,510
Tea	23,167
Coffee	9,483
Sugar	267,699
Salt	38,741
Maize	3,965,400
Bran	923,948
Oats	1,270,570
Hay, &c.	1,864,223

Roughly speaking, some 40,000 lbs. of food was consumed daily by the garrison[2] during the first weeks of the investment. The 2,470 natives of the Indian contingent appear to have been well supplied with ghi (clarified butter), goor (unrefined sugar), atta (whole meal), and as the staple article of diet, rice. The Kaffirs (2,440) received a ration of meat equal to that of the whites and plenty of maize meal. The civilian population, after their private stores had been requisitioned on November 6th, were allowed the same rations as the troops, the 150 children, under ten years of age, half rations. Besides the ordinary items of food there was a considerable supply of medical stores including wines, spirits, arrowroot, sago, beef tea, condensed milk, &c.

The requisitioning, which was carried out on the basis of payment

[1] These "had not even been tallied or counted as received, in spite of the remonstrances of the consignors; but by means of Kaffir labourers, working night and day, the trucks were off-loaded as fast as possible, and again sent down the line to bring up more food." See Appendix to "The Diary of a Siege," by Mr. Nevinson.

[2] The scale of rations for the troops were as follows:—

Bread	1¼ lb.	or biscuit	1 lb.
Fresh meat ...	1¼ lb.	„ preserved meat ...	1 lb.
Coffee	1 oz.	„ tea	½ oz.
Sugar	3 oz.		
Salt	½ oz.		
Pepper	1/36 oz.		
Potatoes... ...	½ lb.	„ compressed vegetable...	1 oz.

for all stores at prices fixed by a civilian and a military commissioner, yielded the following results :—

Cattle 1,511	Kaffir corn 68,370 lbs.
Goats and sheep 1,092	Boer meal 108,739 lbs.
Maize 1,517,996 lbs.	(Coarse wheatmeal)

together with 14,000 tins of preserved milk. All wines and spirits were taken and afterwards mainly appropriated to the use of the sick. With the exception of a few cattle looted at night by our scouts, and the scanty crops of maize and hay which parties of the garrison were able to collect under the muzzles of the enemy's guns, no other supplies entered the town during the investment.

The Boers did what they could to augment the difficulties of supply by increasing the number of the non-combatants within the British lines. During the first three weeks of the siege they sent into the British camp 104 wounded soldiers and ten assistant-surgeons together with a number of English and Indians, refugees from Dundee. On the 23rd they endeavoured to send in 230 coolies, but White refused, and the Indians were allowed to join Buller's force. Two days later the enemy made the capture of oxen to which we have already referred.

In the numerous published accounts of the siege there is little complaint either on the score of food or health until near the date of Colenso. But as early as November 7th the ration was slightly reduced, and by the end of that month luxuries were beginning to run low, although there was still abundance of tea and coffee, bread and meat. But even in the case of these articles care had to be exercised; the meat ration for Kaffirs was reduced to ½ lb., and the daily allowance of forage to 10 lbs. per horse.[1] Vegetables were becoming scarce, a pound of potatoes costing 1s. to 1s. 6d. at the sales, which were held three times a week; and after November tinned vegetables were kept for the sick. Fruit up to the middle of December was easily pro-

[1] In the middle of December Colonel Ward reckoned that he could hold out till March 9th (3 months); on January 10th or 12th till March 31st. See Questions 5,869–5,871. Evidence given before the Royal Commission.

curable: "peaches, apricots, and grapes were to be had almost for the trouble of taking."

While the supply of food was slowly diminishing, the evil results of confinement, bad drainage, and exposure were becoming increasingly visible. Up to November 30th the sick amongst the garrison numbered 475; by December 15th the total had risen to 874; on the 31st it stood at 1,558, enteric and dysentery claiming more than half of the cases. In the first weeks of December the doctors were growing alarmed; on the day of Colenso fifty of the Imperial Light Horse were invalided, and the 19th Hussars are reported to have had ninety-six men down with enteric.[1] On December 17th it was a matter of congratulation to the Colonel of the 1st Devons that he had no case of enteric in his battalion. No doubt the news of Buller's repulse and the lowering of the rations which immediately followed had something to do with this increase of disease, but the conditions of life in Ladysmith were becoming daily more unfavourable to a healthy condition of the body, or to recovery when once sickness had seized upon it. The want of fresh milk was now severely felt, and on December 28th Colonel Stoneman determined to take possession of all the milch cows and forward their yield for the use of the sick alone. Under the control of that officer and Captain Thompson, a dairy farm[2] was started, and the milk was issued to civilians and soldiers on production of a certificate. In the same way poultry and eggs were also requisitioned for hospital supply. The sound principle was laid down that whoever refused to sell an essential article at a reasonable price was deprived of it by requisition; and in more than one case an owner, who demanded prohibitive prices with a view to realising at a higher rate later on, was justly punished for his meanness. In the case of the so-called luxuries the method of requisition was not employed, and to the end of the siege sales were held every few days, at which enormous prices were recorded.

Since December 4th useless horses had been killed, in order

[1] Probably the corps in the low ground by the river suffered more at first than the infantry on the surrounding hills.

[2] This establishment was still working at the end of March, the owners of the cows being paid for the milk obtained.

that the remaining forage might be kept for those in better condition, but no horse meat seems to have been eaten until January 8th, when an animal which had been killed by a shell was divided amongst several of the messes. The supply of fresh beef was nearly exhausted, but a considerable quantity of preserved meat was still available, and "the horse meat era" was postponed for some weeks longer.

Meanwhile the question of hospital management and supply was becoming daily more important. The sudden increase in the number of sick threw a strain upon Intombi Camp which with the available resources it was impossible to meet. Even at the beginning of the war there had been a deficiency both of doctors and orderlies, and though before the siege commenced the staff had been increased by several civil surgeons and some nurses, this deficiency obtained throughout the investment. The accommodation was also very inadequate. In the middle of October the British army in Natal was only provided with the hospital equipment of a field force. Each brigade was supplied with a field hospital, which "has no beds . . . is provided with no invalid clothing, and in other respects is only equipped with the bare requisites for the temporary treatment of one hundred patients." Nearly half of the field establishment, with most of the stores belonging to it, were lost at Dundee.[1] One stationary hospital, which was intended to be partially mobile, and carried equipment, but not beds, for one hundred men, was also in Ladysmith when the siege began. It was, of course, intended that these hospitals should be continually emptied of the sick and wounded who would be sent to the fixed hospitals in rear where a larger and more complete accommodation was prepared. When, however, Ladysmith was surrounded, the mobile hospitals had to serve the purpose of base hospitals, and as they did not, owing to their particular constitution, provide accommodation for great numbers of sick, their deficiencies had to be made good by drawing on local resources. The tents originally brought to Intombi sufficed for three hundred beds; these were soon filled, and the rapidly increasing demand had to be met by various

[1] Ten of the assistant surgeons were sent back into Ladysmith by the Boers, but the others they kept.

expedients, which, for some time, proved more or less inadequate. Tents and mattresses were difficult to obtain in sufficient numbers; the former being supplied from the camps of the garrison, or by repaired articles from the ordnance stores, while the mattress cases were stuffed with hay, coir, or, later on, at Colonel Stoneman's order, with wool and hair shorn from the goats and sheep. As the tent-room was increased it was found possible to provide more men with bedsteads or bedboards, and throughout Lieut.-Colonel Mapleton, the principal medical officer at Intombi, went on the system of placing the worst cases in the large tents where more space for raised bedding could be obtained. Not less important than the question of accommodation was that of sanitation. The difficulty of keeping the camp wholesome was greatly intensified by the lowness of its position which rendered it liable to floods in the rainy season. Two hundred and fifty Indians and 131 Kaffirs were constantly at work entrenching, scavenging, washing, and grave-digging. The results seem on the whole to have been good, though Colonel Stoneman, after inspecting the camp at the end of December, saw necessary to order trenches to be dug round every tent and the earth to be thrown inwards to prevent the water coming in.

Food was sent daily from the town, the civilians, medical staff, nurses, and assistants getting the regular army ration, and the sick being supplied as their condition required. Until February they had plenty to eat and drink, with the important exception of milk. Thanks, however, to the requisitioning of milch-cows it was possible to the end of the siege to supply the worst fever cases with 12 ozs. daily; indeed, those who suffered most at this period were not the seriously ill but the convalescent, whose recovery was greatly retarded by the want of strengthening food.[1]

[1] Up till the end of January, when the retirement from Spion Kop caused an immediate reduction of rations, the daily allowance of fever patients was as follows:—

2 oz. spirits.
2 oz. cereals (arrowroot, cornflour, sago).
Unlimited wheat and rice flour.
Nearly ½ oz. of prepared meat extracts.
1¼ lbs. fresh meat (in the form of beef tea).
5 oz. sugar, tea, bread (for those who were able to take it).

The evidence as to the charges of waste and robbery, which led to Colonel Stoneman's mission to the Camp at the end of December, agrees in pointing to the civilians who assisted in the hospitals, at the camp-bakery, and at the unloading of the trains as the main culprits, but some of the orderlies in attendance on the Imperial Light Horse were also accused of selling milk to the sick, and a commissariat sergeant was convicted of stealing brandy. The effects of the pilfering are differently stated, Colonel Exham, P.M.O., in Ladysmith, being of opinion that the deaths which occurred during the last period of the siege were not due to the robbery of stores, while Colonel Stoneman, on December 30th, says definitely that "without being able to lay the blame on any individual, there can be no doubt that there has been—especially during the first month—a considerable amount of waste and pilfering, and the result of that waste, &c., is that now there is want." This paucity of medical comforts must have been in every way more serious six weeks later, when, in view of the uncertain length of the siege, it was necessary to dole them out with a very cautious hand. Thanks to the suddenness of the relief a considerable quantity of stores was still available when the end came, but this is, of course, no proof that the supplies were adequate.

One of the best features of Intombi Camp was the excellent arrangement of the water supply. The Klip river water, although almost entirely free of animal matter, was full of red mud, and had to be sterilised by filtration. The mud was at first precipitated by alum, and when this gave out on December 19th distillers were extemporised by Engineer Sheen, of the Naval Brigade, from which 1,500 gallons of drinking water were daily supplied to the camp and garrison. After January 25th coal ran short, and from that date the Klip seems to have been the only source of supply.

But though many of the material difficulties were conquered by the courage and resource of the headquarter and medical staff, the small numbers of the latter could not be increased, and militated grievously against the strength and elasticity of the hospital management. From this want of trained nurses, orderlies, and doctors sprang "the irregularities and larceny" to which reference has been made above, for the

Royal Army Medical Corps, which only numbered sixty-nine in all, had to be supplemented with volunteers from the civilian refugees, and these were few, unwilling, untrained, and generally unsatisfactory from lack of supervision. So rapid was the increase of the sick in December and January that the doctors and nurses had constantly to be redistributed. The want of tent equipments finally made separate convalescent hospitals impossible, and "each part of the camp had to be prepared to receive a share of those requiring special attention. The whole had to be arranged on "a simple decimal system," the proportion of doctors, nurses, and assistants to patients sinking as the ranks of the former were thinned and those of the latter were swelled by starvation and disease. The following figures, supplied by Major Westcott, R.A.M.C.,[1] show how far the staff was below the establishment set down by the War Office as adequate to deal with the enormously increased numbers of sick :—

Numbers and Composition of Actual Staff in Ladysmith.		Total.	Proper War Scale.
Officers, R.A.M.C.	11	22	81
Volunteers	2		
Civilians	9		
Non-Commissioned officers including 21 R.A.M.C.		38	112
Men, R.A.M.C.	69	350	508
Civilians	128		
Men of the garrison and men recovered from wounds received at Dundee	163		
Nurses		32	36
Indians		87	
Native labour gang		361	

In three months the number of beds had risen from 300 to 1,900;

[1] Hospital Commission. Appendix, p. 208. We conclude that amongst the numbers below are included those members of the Natal Volunteer Medical Corps. According to the "Natal Volunteer Record" these numbered at the commencement of the siege, 9 officers, 34 men, 18 nurses. Of these 6 officers, 31 men, 11 nurses fell sick during the investment.

each doctor was attending eighty patients or convalescents; each nurse sixty. On December 31st there were in the camp 350 wounded, 800 men suffering from enteric, and 300 from dysentery, many being in a very critical condition. Under the stress of work by day and night many of the medical officers broke down; 25 per cent. of the R.A.M.C. and a large proportion of the nurses were at one time in hospital. Of the R.A.M.C., Major Westcott says, "They worked until they dropped from sheer exhaustion"; of the nurses: "They were probably never

FIELD ARTILLERY CROSSING THE KLIP RIVER.

called upon in any campaign to endure such hardships and exhibit such devotion to their duty. All the worst cases of enteric fever were not only nursed by them, but they also undertook the preparation of the more delicate items of food."

At the end of December Colonel Stoneman, A.S.C., D.A.A.G., was ordered by Sir George White to go to Intombi and report upon the general administration and management. That able officer, while doing full justice to the courage and endurance of those responsible, found that there existed "a great want of system, organisation, and

foresight." He considered that the various duties were not properly distributed. Not only were there too few of the R.A.M.C. available for their proper duties, but the small staff had work thrown upon it which it should never have been required to do. Amongst his most important recommendations were: (1) That an officer with a suitable staff should be told off to supervise the sanitation and water supply and to manage the trench digging and other outdoor duties connected with the camp; and (2) that an ordnance officer should be sent to Intombi, through whom applications for supplies should be made direct to the ordnance department in Ladysmith, not, as had been the case until his visit, through the chief medical officer. Colonel Stoneman also reorganised the 271 Kaffirs employed on camp duties in gangs, fixed their scale of pay, and impressed all the civilians he could, both men and women, as hospital assistants, or as makers of shirts and other necessaries for the sick. Lieutenant Doherty, "our best supply officer," was ordered to give special attention to the camp, and every effort was made to increase by requisition the supply of poultry, eggs, and milk. Colonel Stoneman's suggestion that a barrier should be made between the civil camp and the hospitals appears also to have been carried out, and other steps were taken to check pilfering, to which he refers as a fact beyond the possibility of doubt or denial. Unquestionably his visit to Intombi Camp was followed by a very considerable improvement of its condition, although the growing scarcity of supplies, doctors, and nurses tried more and more severely the various classes of its occupants. When General Buller entered the town he inspected the hospitals and expressed his great satisfaction with the management; nor does there seem any reason to doubt that everything that was possible was done during the last months of the siege.

In the town, despite the tireless energy and foresight of Colonel Ward, things changed slowly but irresistibly for the worse. On January 15th the Liverpool Regiment had 170 in hospital; the Imperial Light Horse could only muster 150 men out of an original strength of 475; the Border Mounted Rifles ninety-six out of 200; the Devonshire Regiment 450 out of the total of 984 with which they entered the field in October. A week later the number of the sick from various

causes had nearly reached 3,000, and up to the same date thirty-two premature births had taken place, a result of the terror inspired by the bombardment. From November 1st to January 31st 179 officers and 4,833 men had been admitted to hospital for disease; of these six officers and 286 men had died, and eighty-nine officers and 2,056 men were still under treatment, rather more than half having returned to duty, many of them insufficiently cured. Forty officers and 285 men were lying in hospital wounded. Of the 518 deaths from disease during the siege 382 were due to enteric and 109 to dysentery, these two ailments accounting for nearly 95 per cent. Of the officers treated about 4·33 per cent., and of the men 5·41 died, a proof of the impartiality with which the attentions of the doctors and nurses were bestowed. Major Westcott notes that the rate of mortality from enteric was lower in Ladysmith than in India by over 5 per cent.; indeed, throughout the South African campaign, in spite of violent outbreaks of disease, the percentage of deaths to cases was small. That this should have been so in Ladysmith was especially remarkable, for the town was from the outset unhealthy and towards the end of the siege extremely unsanitary, while the scarcity of supplies greatly increased the liability to sickness and the difficulty of recovery.

The days following the great fight were utilised by the garrison to improve and extend the lines of defence. The indefatigable Rifle Brigade laboured at the fortification of Waggon Hill; the Manchester Regiment increased their works on Cæsar's Camp. Behind them on Convent and Poundbury Hills and along the bend of the Klip River south of the town a second line of works was prepared, in case Observation Hill and Cæsar's Camp were lost. The garrison of this new line was a battalion composed of drivers of the ammunition columns and Army Service Corps, spare drivers from the batteries, men of the pay department, officers' servants, &c. The officers were furnished from the same sources. The strength of this new corps was about 800, and in a few days it was quite capable of giving a good account of itself behind entrenchments. It is a weak spot in our military system that many men employed in the field are not taught to handle a rifle.

The moral and material trials of the garrison after the 6th of

January accumulated fast. Perhaps the most trying experience of all was that of the Spion Kop operations, during which the hopes of the garrison were raised to the height of unquestioning assurance only to be dashed by bitter and crushing disappointment. For days the shells of Buller's guns could be seen bursting along the ridges above the Tugela, and on the morning of the 24th the troops on Spion Kop could be seen through the telescope. The fierce fighting of that day was followed by an almost wholesale retreat of the Boer laagers, which ever since the commencement of the operations had been visible in the plain behind the river barrier. Two days passed without news, but as early as the 25th an ominous rumour began to spread that the Boer laagers were returning to their original positions. Not until the 27th, owing to the cloudy weather, was Buller able to heliograph the news of his defeat.

The question has been raised whether White should have aided Buller during his second endeavour to relieve the town. As we now learn from his message of January 7th he regarded his garrison as incapable of any serious effort. If such an operation had been attempted it would almost certainly have taken the form of an attack upon Rifleman's Ridge or Lancer's Nek. Before Colenso such an enterprise was, as we know, seriously contemplated by the headquarter staff. Had it been carried out on the 24th of January, or indeed on any of the days of the preceding week, its moral effect would certainly have been considerable. Moreover the Ridge would have been valuable as a position from which to intercept Boers retiring northward. But its waterless and far-stretching flanks would not have been easy to hold; and without some definite arrangement with Buller its occupation might easily have proved a source of weakness. In view of the condition of his garrison and the uncertainty of the situation on the Tugela, Sir George White was wise in not attempting it.[1]

The arrival of the news of Spion Kop was followed by a reduction in rations. The supply of oxen was then almost exhausted, grain was running short, and it became necessary to slaughter every horse that could be spared. Enough were retained to horse about a half squadron in every cavalry regiment, the field

[1] See Appendix C.

batteries, and seventy officers' chargers; the rest were sent to the butcher, 300 being first of all shot, and the others, horses and mules, being killed at the rate of about seventy a day. These were turned into "Chevril" at the rate of 15 lbs. meat to 1 lb. of essence, or sixteen pints of beef-tea. A factory of this imitation Bovril was set up in the sheds at the railway station and the produce issued in the form of soup, meat extract, jelly (made from the bones), and paste. The oil which remained over was used for lubricating the Naval guns. On these various preparations of horse meat the garrison mainly relied through the last three weeks of the siege. Tea, sugar, and bread were rapidly disappearing, and mealie maize and biscuit had replaced the finer kinds of grain. In order to supply the absence of hay a corps of grass cutters was formed under Major Wickham, but the amount of grass obtainable was very small, and had sometimes to be collected under the enemy's fire. At last the horses were roped in pairs to prevent their straying, and turned out to graze. The frequent result of this was that the unfortunate beasts became entangled amongst stones or trees, "literally starving to death, while it was by no means rare to find a live horse coupled to one either dead or crippled by shell-fire."

Great as was the "stagnation" of exhaustion and disease which brooded over the town and camps, there was no rest in the outer lines during the whole of this dreary period. Preparations were constantly going forward to strengthen the defences against a possible assault.[1] Barbed wire was plentifully used, fresh redoubts thrown up, empty tins, bottles, &c., scattered along the front of the sangars; on Cæsar's Camp abattis were erected and trenches dug—everything was done that might betray or impede the advance of an enemy. The troops were well-nigh worn out with their privations. Their clothes were in rags, many were without boots; in the Manchester Regiment alone 120 were barefoot. But they still had their rifles and plenty of ammunition, and their

[1] Sir Redvers Buller's letter to Lord Roberts on February 4th is an eloquent comment on the condition of the garrison. "White keeps a stiff upper lip, but some of those under him are desponding. He calculates he has now 7,000 effectives. . . . He expects to be attacked in force this week, and though he affects to be confident, I doubt if he really is. He has begged me to keep the enemy off him as much as I can, and I can only do this by pegging away. . . ."

bearing was resolute and uncomplaining. Day after day they lay in the advanced works opposite their weary antagonists, listening to the roar of the distant cannonade which had so often deluded them with the hopes of a speedy relief. Down behind them lay the town with its starving and listless population. Men were now so weak from want of nourishment that they "had no other aspiration but to lie down all day, no other desire than to be left to their own moody reflections. It was the dangerous stage, upon which fever and death quickly followed, for fever then meant in most cases death. No one had the vitality to fight the disease." The only interesting moment of the day was the hour of the distribution of rations, when the mixed crowd of civilians—European, African, and Asiatic—numbering altogether about 1,500 persons, presented their orders and defiled through a gangway guarded by barbed wire to the depôts where the tea, sugar, meat, and biscuit were given out.[1] The Indians and Kaffirs received their allowances at the station. The supply of the Indian camp-followers was a further difficulty, as only about 500 out of the 2,000 present would eat beef. The deficiency in their own native foods had to be supplied by mealie meal, and this substance in the form of coarse cakes served as the main diet for these men until the end of the siege. During the last fortnight the garrison lived almost exclusively on horseflesh. After the retirement from Vaalkranz the rations were still further reduced, and on February 13th one of the last sales was held. The most remarkable items are perhaps worth quoting :—

¼ lb. Navy Cut tobacco	60s.
50 Cigars	190s.
100 La Union Cigars	290s.
Eggs per dozen	40s. to 45s.
1 Bottle Rum	90s.
„ Port Wine	60s.
„ Champagne	70s.

A dozen bottles of whisky (ordinary price, 24s.) were raffled for the benefit of the owner's widow and fetched £120. The last sale was held on February 21st. During the last three weeks of the siege

[1] Viz., European residents, 560 ; refugees, 540 ; Indians, 150 ; Kaffirs, 300.

the garrison lived alternately on half and quarter rations,[1] according as the news sent in by Buller was good or bad.

On February 27th quarter rations were ordered for the last time, this reduction being due to the check which General Buller had received between the 22nd and 26th. Next day the news of his victory at Pieter's Hill caused the rations to be doubled, and in the evening his cavalry rode into the town.

For days before the relief actually took place there had been signs that the Boers were seriously disquieted. On the 15th a "very large trek" went on all day towards the north-east from behind Telegraph Hill towards Pepworth Station, and another was reported over Pieter's Nek in the same direction, but the waggons returned to the Tugela in the evening. On February 17th news of the relief of Kimberley arrived, and on the two following days the British shells could be seen bursting on Cingolo and Monte Cristo, and 160 Boer waggons were counted moving north behind Bulwana. A trek was also reported from the direction of Potgieter's Drift. On February 22nd more waggons were seen going north. In the evening it was believed at headquarters that the Free Staters were retiring to the western border, and that Lucas Meyer with 400 men had left by train. It was this constant movement which cheated General Buller into the belief that the whole of the Boer army had retreated, and prompted him to return to Colenso and march on Ladysmith along the roads. It would appear that a part at least of the Boers who actually left the Tugela on and before the 22nd, were moved to do so by the reports of Roberts' advance.[2]

[1] The lower scale was as follows:—

EUROPEANS—1 lb. fresh meat;
¼ lb. biscuits;
3 oz. maize meal;
1 oz. sugar;
And very small quantities of tea, salt, pepper, &c.

KAFFIRS—1¼ lb. meat (chiefly horseflesh);
8 oz. maize meal.

INDIANS—8 oz. maize meal, and a little rice.

[2] Between the 20th and 23rd Boers reported to have come from Natal were hovering round our lines at Paardeberg.

But the remaining Boers had as yet no intention of abandoning the struggle. About the middle of February they put into execution their plan for damming the Klip river and flooding Ladysmith.[1] This despairing effort came too late, and would in all probability have effected little towards that end. But it was not allowed an undisturbed trial. A 12-pounder was placed on Cæsar's Camp on the night of February 21st, and opened fire on the Dam in the river gorge below Intombi early the next morning. In so doing it drew a heavy, but ineffectual fire from Bulwana. On the 23rd it again fired on the Dam, two guns of the 42nd Battery joining in with good effect, and keeping up a slow fire during the night. On the 25th a 4·7 inch was mounted near the 12-pounder, and the two fired next day on a train supplying the Dam with material, and partially checked the progress of the working parties. The same night Lieutenant Theobald, with fifteen men of the Gloucesters, set fire to the abattis constructed by the Boers at the foot of Gun Hill. The blaze drew a furious fire from the enemy, but the little detachment retired without loss.

Still the fortunes of the Relief Column hung in the balance. Buller had given up the attempt to force his way between the river and Grobler's Kloof; his movement had received a serious check, and on the 26th the thunder of his guns died away. Next day the hopes of the garrison were dashed to the ground by the order to reduce the rations. Relief seemed as far off as ever, when, in the afternoon, the renewal of the canonade again roused their hopes. At the approach of night the firing ceased, but nothing was known of the result. Next morning came the news of Cronje's surrender, but it was not till the afternoon that Buller's message arrived assuring them of certain and speedy relief. About the same time the besieged became conscious of great activity in the Boer laagers, and, as evening approached, it was clear that the enemy had abandoned all hopes of another stand. Long white lines of waggons and darker masses of

[1] The inception of this scheme dates from the end of January. On the last day of the month Buller informed White of it. The exact day on which the work commenced is uncertain. On February 16th White reports "Boers still working hard at dam." A number of Kaffirs were employed in the work, and a large quantity of sand-bags were found on the spot after the town was relieved.

horsemen were seen hurrying to the northward on both sides of the town, but the garrison were unable as yet to harass their retreat, and the retreating columns were out of reach of even the Naval guns. Only on Bulwana, where the Boers set up a gyn to hoist the 6-inch gun out of its emplacement, were the enemy assailable. Upon the great redoubt both the 4·7 guns were turned about mid-day, and at the third shot the hoisting machinery disappeared. During the day the Dutch made no further attempt to remove the piece, but in the night, in spite of a slow fire from the Naval guns, they succeeded, and the defenders of the town were deprived of the satisfaction of capturing the famous gun which had tormented them for so long.

With evening a heavy thunderstorm drove the inhabitants of the town to their quarters, but the storm passed, and just as the sun was setting, the squadrons under Lieutenant-Colonel Hubert Gough, who had ridden forward on his own initiative, appeared in the gorge of the Klip beyond Intombi. A wild indiscriminate rush was made to meet the horsemen ; they crossed the river and entered the main street just as night fell, and amidst cheering and weeping crowds Sir George White and Colonel Gough met.

With the close of the investment of Ladysmith, the initiative passes finally out of the hands of the Boers. The second period of the war in Natal ends with the complete frustration of the Dutch plans, the discomfiture of their main army, and its reduction, with a few trifling exceptions, to a strict defensive. Its brave old commander, broken in mind and body, had only a few more weeks to live. He gave over the command into the more vigorous hands of Louis Botha, and retired to his own country to die. The scheme to which he had never given his full consent had failed. Southern Natal was safe, the great Dutch rising, which would probably have followed the fall of Ladysmith, had not taken place, the confident host which he had led over the frontier nearly five months before had diminished in numbers, and had lost much of its material. The moral effects of the relief, following so closely on the surrender of Cronje, were still more important. Buller, indeed, did not continue his advance through Natal, but halted his army round Ladysmith for rest

and re-equipment; and White's men were temporarily incapable of active work.[1] But in spite of the General's inaction, neither side mistook for a moment the significance of the Boer retreat from Ladysmith. It was not the mere raising of an investment soon to be followed by vigorous operations against the relieving army. The burghers had striven their utmost to reduce the town and check Buller, and their failure was equal to a decisive defeat in the field. The 8,000 men killed, wounded, sick, and missing which the campaign in Natal had cost the British, were a high price to pay, but the resultant advantages were great. If the skill and daring of Lord Roberts first destroyed the legend of Boer invincibility, and if the decisive strokes of the war had still to be struck by the fine army which was now halting at Osfontein, the last hopes of the Boers vanished with the relief of Ladysmith. The fall of that place and the capture of the brave garrison and its chivalrous commander would, in the eyes of the world at least, have counterbalanced the day of Paardeberg; the defeat of the great enterprise and the end of the Dutch offensive in Natal sealed the fate of the Republics.

[1] White's vigorous attempt to pursue the retiring enemy has been described in Volume I.

CHAPTER VI

THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE EMPIRE

EFFECT OF THE REVERSES OF DECEMBER, 1899—APPEAL TO THE YEOMANRY AND VOLUNTEERS—IMPERIAL YEOMANRY—ENROLMENT—ORGANISATION—EQUIPMENT—ADMINISTRATION—HORSES—THE IMPERIAL YEOMANRY IN THE FIELD—THE VOLUNTEER COMPANIES—TERMS OF SERVICE—THE C.I.V.—OTHER SPECIAL CORPS—PUBLIC ENTHUSIASM—REINFORCEMENTS OF REGULAR TROOPS IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY—THE COLONIAL CONTINGENTS—THE MILITARY INSTITUTIONS OF AUSTRALIA PREVIOUS TO THE WAR—THE AUSTRALIAN CONTINGENTS—NEW ZEALAND—CANADA—CEYLON—INDIA—SOUTH AFRICAN FORCES—NATAL—CAPE COLONY—CORPS RAISED BY GENERAL BULLER—ARRIVAL OF LORD ROBERTS—NEW CORPS—BRABANT'S COLONIAL DIVISION—GENERAL SUMMARY OF FORCES RAISED BEFORE THE MIDDLE OF FEBRUARY, 1900—CRITICAL SITUATION IN CAPE COLONY BETWEEN DECEMBER AND FEBRUARY

THE reverses of December, 1899, impressed the British Government and the country at large with some sense of the vastness of the task they had undertaken, and the immediate necessity of large reinforcements. From that moment our military policy took a form hitherto unknown, which owed its initiation to the urgency of the crisis and its ultimate success to the remarkable adaptability of the raw material employed and the favourable nature of the conditions under which it was developed. The steady depletion of the Regular Army in England and the apparent need of augmenting the number of mounted troops in South Africa forced the Government to appeal to voluntary effort; and however opinions may differ as to the actual steps taken to use the resources ready to hand—and both in the matter of the home volunteers and the Colonial Contingents the authorities acted with want of insight and courage—there can be no doubt as to the importance of the movement, whether as regards the War in South Africa or the future of the British Army.

When the news of Colenso arrived, the Sixth Division was already under orders to embark. The day after the battle Sir Redvers Buller

asked for the immediate despatch of the Seventh Division and 8,000 mounted irregulars. The Defence Committee met on the afternoon of the 16th, and in view of the urgency of the crisis determined to make an appeal to the Auxiliary Forces, as well as to send out the Seventh Division and large reinforcements of Artillery. The whole of the remaining portions of the Army Reserve were called up, nine Militia battalions were allowed to volunteer for service out of the United Kingdom; and on the 2nd of February Mr. Wyndham was able to state that in answer to fresh demands fourteen were already in South Africa, and five in garrison at Malta, in the Channel Islands, and in Canada. During the following months no less than seventy-one battalions of the old constitutional force were embodied, and on the 1st of August the number of militiamen sent to South Africa, most of which were at first employed on the lines of communication, reached a total of over 21,000.

The need of large numbers of mounted men had indeed been foreseen by those who had learnt the lesson of the first Boer War. Early in October Colonel Lucas had proposed to Major-General Borrett, Inspector-General of Auxiliary Forces, that a composite regiment of Yeomanry should be mobilised at once for service in South Africa, but he was told that there was no intention of employing that force. On November 14th he made the same offer, drawing attention to the good work already done by the Natal Volunteers, and again met with a refusal. On November 9th Lord Lonsdale, whose experience of the horse in various parts of the world was to secure him a place on the future Yeomanry Committee, having made all arrangements for the equipment and transport of from 500 to 1,000 men, appealed to the War Office, but as in the case of the proposal of Colonel Lucas, the official sanction was not forthcoming, and no steps could be taken. Not until the reverses of December had aroused the authorities both at home and in South Africa to a sense of the requirements of the situation, was it determined to raise a force of 3,000 men, a figure increased later to 8,000, and finally to close on 11,000.

The Yeomanry Cavalry, the actual strength of which was then 10,207, comprised 110 squadrons divided unevenly among thirty-eight

regiments. It was at once determined, however, that while the Yeomen already enrolled should be relied upon to form the nucleus of the new force, volunteers and civilians having the necessary qualifications should also be allowed to join. Eventually, out of 10,371 men who went to South Africa, 6,186 were members of various professions, 2,287 joined the Special Corps, and only 1,898 were Yeomen. The fact that less than one-fifth of the original Yeomanry left England is a sufficient indication of the wide area which was tapped in procuring the 8,000 odd men who composed the bulk of the force. A considerable number of these had served in the Volunteers, and there can be no doubt that the discipline and knowledge of the rifle which they had acquired at home made them a very valuable element in the Imperial Yeomanry.[1]

A small *ad interim* committee consisting of Lord Chesham, Lord Valentia, and Colonel Lucas, began their work at once, and on December 19th were able to announce to the public the intended formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, and to give the outlines of the organisation, equipment, terms of enlistment, and method of enrolment. On January 4th the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry Committee, consisting of seven officers, was sanctioned and the work was pushed on with great rapidity. Colonel Lucas undertook the general supervision, Lieutenant-Colonel Becket, M.P., the control of the financial department, Lord Valentia the management of the enrolment and establishment, Colonel St. Quintin and Lord Lonsdale the care of the remounts and saddlery, Captain Bagot the clothing and equipment, and Lord Harris the transport and shipping.

The organisation of the force can best be learnt from the Army Order of February 28th, which revised and superseded that of January 4th. It was to enter the field as mounted infantry, carrying rifle and bayonet instead of the sword, and was organised in companies of 121 of all ranks, application for enrolment being made through colonels commanding Yeomanry regiments. The pay was at cavalry rates, and officers and men were required to bring their own clothing, saddlery, and accoutrements for which they were to receive a capitation grant of £25,[2] or

[1] See Appendix E for further information on the Imperial Yeomanry.

[2] Afterwards increased to £35.

if they brought their own horses, of £40. Arms, ammunition, camp equipment, and transport were provided by Government. The terms of enlistment were for one year or for not less than the period of the war.

The selection of the company officers and all below them was settled on the spot by officers commanding regiments, subject always to the approval of the Imperial Yeomanry Committee. Each Imperial Yeoman had to be between twenty and thirty-five years of age,[1] and was required to pass riding, shooting, and medical tests, the physical standard being the same as in the light cavalry. He was entitled to the same gratuities and allowances as the regular soldier, and at the end of his period of service an extra sum of £5.

After the recruits had been enrolled and approved the companies were assembled, and during their period of training, drew their regular messing, lodging, forage, and stable allowances, except in cases where they were billeted. Each company had to pass an inspection, after which it with three others was formed into a battalion. These latter received Roman numbers, I., II., III., &c., the companies Arabic figures from 1 to 78, irrespective of the battalions of which they formed part. This method was convenient for, both before and after their arrival in South Africa, the battalions could rarely be kept together,[2] and in general the force worked in separate companies. Indeed from the circumstances of their organisation it was impossible that there could exist much *esprit de corps* between the different companies, and their wide distribution in the field further accentuated this lack of corporate feeling. The link that was to bind the companies together, the battalion staff, formed of old cavalry officers selected by the War Office, did not often get an opportunity of exercising its influence, and was frequently employed on general staff work which had little to do with the battalion it was supposed to command. The one other formation which belonged to the battalion as a whole was the machine-gun section. Each battalion was allowed to take one of these weapons

[1] For service at the base, candidates up to forty-five years might be accepted.

[2] The Yeomanry with Lord Methuen and General Rundle were exceptions. See Appendix E.

provided that it furnished the gun,[1] and fourteen out of the twenty battalions sent out took Colts and Maxims firing the ·303 ammunition, and equipped with the Dundonald galloping carriages. Twenty-two machine-guns in all actually accompanied the force, but, as was to be expected, they were used entirely without reference to their battalions. The tactical and administrative companies were, with a few exceptions, companies, or, as in some instances they afterwards came to be called, squadrons.

At Maitland, near Cape Town, Base and Remount Depôts were organised, and from these the force was supplied during the first part of 1900. But this arrangement proved very unsatisfactory. The establishment allowed by the War Office was quite inadequate, and moreover was never complete, for some of the men detailed for duty there were sent up to make good the gaps at the front. Later on the Maitland Depôts were broken up, and the Yeomanry were furnished from the depôts of the Imperial Army. A further difficulty during the first weeks in South Africa was want of horses, a large number of those intended for the Yeomanry being requisitioned to supply the pressing wants of the cavalry and mounted infantry.

In spite of these and other obstacles the enthusiastic response to the call for mounted infantry, and the energy of the directing officers, produced remarkable results. The most potent factor in the success of the movement was undoubtedly the pre-existing Yeomanry organisation, and the territorial basis on which it was maintained. Not only did it give full scope to local feeling and render possible the raising of the separate companies, but from the old Yeomanry were supplied almost all the officers and non-commissioned officers. It is not unfair to say that the original force formed the skeleton, and that without this framework the whole body would never have been half as efficient as it proved. Two months after the issue of the order

[1] This haphazard arrangement seems to have been partially due to the shortage in machine-guns at the time. On the other hand, if the weapons were procurable it was surely undesirable that individual corps should buy against the Ordnance Department. As regards the practical desirability of providing each corps with a machine-gun there seems to have been no very definite opinion.

of January 4th, seventy-seven companies were formed or in process of formation; twenty of these were in South Africa (1,000 being already at the front under Lord Methuen), and twenty-five at sea. By March 31st the total of Yeomen in South Africa was 10,921, at which time the War Office stopped recruiting and forbade the sending of drafts to make good the casualties. Viewed in the light of after events this was certainly extremely unfortunate, but, so rapid had been Lord Roberts's progress, that it may easily have seemed that the original force would be sufficient. The consequence was that one year later, the casualties having risen to nearly one third [1] of the entire force, many of the corps had practically ceased to exist.

The Special and Independent Corps, which formed part of the Yeomanry and had the same organisation, were the Duke of Cambridge's Own [2] (47th Company); the Sharpshooters (XVIIIth Battalion), raised on the suggestion of Mr. Seton Karr, and specially chosen for their riding and shooting; Paget's Horse (XIXth); the "Rough Riders" (XXth) raised by Lord Lathom; the six Irish Companies from Dublin and Belfast, and the Manchester Company (77th). Besides these no fewer than eleven other offers were made by private persons to raise and equip corps of irregulars, but as they stipulated for conditions different from those obtaining in the Imperial Yeomanry, the Committee refused to accept their help. No better illustrations, however, of the patriotic fervour with which the country was then animated can be found than the generous and well-meant proposals of these gentlemen.

We have dwelt in some detail on the organisation of the Imperial Yeomanry, partly on account of the novelty of the experiment, partly because it was attended by results which, perhaps, no other country in the world could have shown in so short a time. But it is easy to ascribe to the force qualities it did not possess, and to jump to conclusions regarding its future utility and possible expansion which the facts do not warrant. The work which it was called upon to do

[1]

Killed.	Died of Disease.	Prisoners.	Wounded.	Invalided to England.	
216	330	606	544	1,397	= 3,033

[2] These men defrayed the cost of their own transport, and received no pay.

in South Africa tested in some degree the worth of the voluntary principle, and the fact that it emerged from the ordeal triumphantly undoubtedly raised the volunteer to a higher position in the estimation of thinking soldiers than he had ever occupied before. Drawn from some of the most vigorous and intelligent classes of the community, and eager for distinction, the Yeoman proved himself superior to the average soldier of the line in intelligence, while many of his officers, necessarily ignorant as most must have been of routine duties, showed independence of judgment as well as high courage in front of the enemy. But it must be remembered that the general conditions were extremely favourable to the success of the experiment. In the first place, the first and best contingent of Imperial Yeomen was, for the most part, composed of men far above the average in intelligence, education, and physique. In the second place, admitting always the value of individual good sense unfettered by hard-and-fast rules in war, South Africa was a peculiarly favourable training ground for raw troops. It was generally possible for them to learn their work gradually, without at once being exposed, as in a European war they easily might have been, to the strain which vast numbers and rapidly conducted operations impose upon the mechanism of an army. Further than this they had to deal with an enemy whose local knowledge, mobility, and cunning was often more than counterbalanced by want of discipline, over-caution, and unwillingness to attack. Thus while the qualities of alertness and resourcefulness were strongly stimulated, the clumsiness and want of method, which cannot at first be eradicated from partially disciplined men, escaped the punishment which a more resolute and better trained enemy might have inflicted. Men in war learn fast, and no doubt the Yeomanry were not long in picking up the essentials of their trade. But it would be idle to pretend, when they first reached South Africa, that collectively or individually they would have been fit to cope with highly trained and disciplined troops. Fortunately the state of the campaign, the character of their enemy, the support of more experienced soldiers, and their own zeal, bravery, and adaptability enabled them to overcome the primary disadvantages entailed

by inexperience. The mistake lies in supposing that a force like the Yeomanry, many of whom were not at first good shots, good riders, experienced in the care of horses, or accustomed to the regular performance of those duties on which the comfort and safety of a force in front of the enemy depend, can, by assembling on horseback with magazine rifles in their hands, hold their own against an equally brave foe to whom all these things are matters of habit. Volunteers of all kinds did valuable work in South Africa, but this was not because they were volunteers but because they showed zeal and capacity to learn.

A measure at least as important as the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry was the raising of the service companies of Volunteers. Each of the regular battalions at the front had been ordered to furnish one company of mounted infantry, and the Volunteer battalions belonging to the several territorial regiments were asked to send a contingent to fill the gaps thus caused. The service companies were to number 110 rank and file, with four officers, all to be carefully selected men, while another "waiting company" was to be formed to act as a reserve at home. The demand was met with the same enthusiasm as had marked the response of the Yeomanry. The general qualifications were the same as those laid down for the mounted force, except that enrolled Volunteers were alone allowed to apply. Only first-class shots were accepted, and the term of foreign service, as for the Yeomanry, was either one year or for the duration of the war. Including the City Imperial Volunteers, over 11,000 Volunteers had reached South Africa by the 1st of August. The weak point of these companies, at any rate at first, was the want of homogeneity in their personnel. Men drawn from different battalions were placed next to those they did not know, and under officers they had in some instances not even seen. Whether every Volunteer battalion, or even the majority of Volunteer battalions could have furnished 114 suitable men and officers may be open to doubt, but it is unquestionable that a certain proportion could have done so, and it is possible that had the War Office been prepared to trust the force so far, a picked few of the many corps which volunteered for service might have been safely sent out as independent battalions. A more adequate recognition of the value

of the Volunteers would have resulted in increased efficiency as well as increased numbers. We are not maintaining that this want of homogeneity permanently crippled the Volunteer companies, for it was just one of those weaknesses which is cured by time alone, but it must certainly have operated disadvantageously at first. In no instance was it more noticeable or more triumphantly overcome than in the case of the City Imperial Volunteers. This corps was composed of men drawn from forty-seven Volunteer battalions, picked shots,[1] commanded by picked officers. The final establishment of the corps was a full battalion of infantry, two companies of mounted infantry, and a 4-gun field battery, manned by the officers and men of the Honourable Artillery Company. The whole numbered about 1,700 men, and their equipment was furnished by public subscription. £100,000 was required, and on Christmas Day, less than a week after the idea of such a corps had been mooted, nearly three-quarters had been subscribed. The Castle and Union Lines of steamships undertook to convey to South Africa free of charge 500 men, and Messrs. Wilson 550 men. The whole were embarked in three drafts during January, the first on the 13th, *i.e.*, about a month after they had been called out. On the same day directions were issued for raising a body of Volunteer Engineers. The twenty local corps, numbering over 12,000 men, were each called upon to supply a selected section of one officer and twenty-five men, and these, on arrival in South Africa, were permanently allotted to companies of the Royal Engineers. The 2nd Cheshire furnished two Railway Sections. The list of voluntary contributions to the Army in South Africa is not yet exhausted. Lady Meux presented Lord Roberts with a battery of quick-firing 12½-pounders of the newest pattern, manufactured by the Elswick firm and manned by its own employés. Lord Lovat raised his Highland Corps of Scouts. Armstrong's Works presented four portable Maxims to the 2nd New Zealand contingent; the pieces were packed on horses and fired from tripods, protected by light shields. The National Rifle Club opened the Bisley range to Yeomanry and Volunteers.

[1] Colonel Mackinnon's remarks on the want of knowledge displayed by some of the men are instructive. See "Journal of the C.I.V.," pp. 8, 21–3. See for further remarks on the Volunteers Appendix F.

The public generally threw themselves into the preparation and equipment of the various corps, the men were forthcoming, and money was poured out ungrudgingly; with the result that within eight months of Colenso over 20,000 volunteers of all kinds had been raised and sent to the seat of war.

Great reinforcements of regular troops also sailed for Africa during January and the early part of February. Besides the ordinary drafts necessary to make good the wastage of the campaign, the 6th and 7th divisions with their artillery and large quantities of horses and stores, and a siege train of thirty-six guns and howitzers were organised in December, and, on January 6th, an order was issued for the mobilisation of three more howitzer and nine additional field batteries. On February 2nd Mr. Wyndham stated, in the House of Commons, that part of the siege train was already in South Africa, together with thirty-eight Naval guns, thirty-six 5-in. howitzers, 234 guns of field and fifty-four of horse artillery. The number of the men who embarked for South Africa during January was 25,000, and on February 12th 50,000 more were under orders to sail. The transport of this vast mass of men, animals, and stores, as well as the organisation and equipment of the Volunteer corps, was carried out with remarkable celerity and completeness. When, at the moment of crisis the much-abused officials at the War Office found themselves confronted with a mass of additional labour, they proved themselves worthy of the occasion. The work done by the great permanent departments is generally forgotten at the very moment when the machine they have constructed and maintained is put in motion. Their unremitting exertions through weary and anxious months are not of the kind to attract recognition, except by their blunders, at a time when men's eyes are turned on the spectacle of march and battle. But it is to be hoped, when the final history of the war in South Africa comes to be written, that the long labours of individuals will be fairly appreciated, and that the public will then be enabled to differentiate between the omissions and weaknesses of an antiquated and cumbrous system and the energy and devotion that did so much to neutralise them.

If the response of all classes to the appeal of the Government

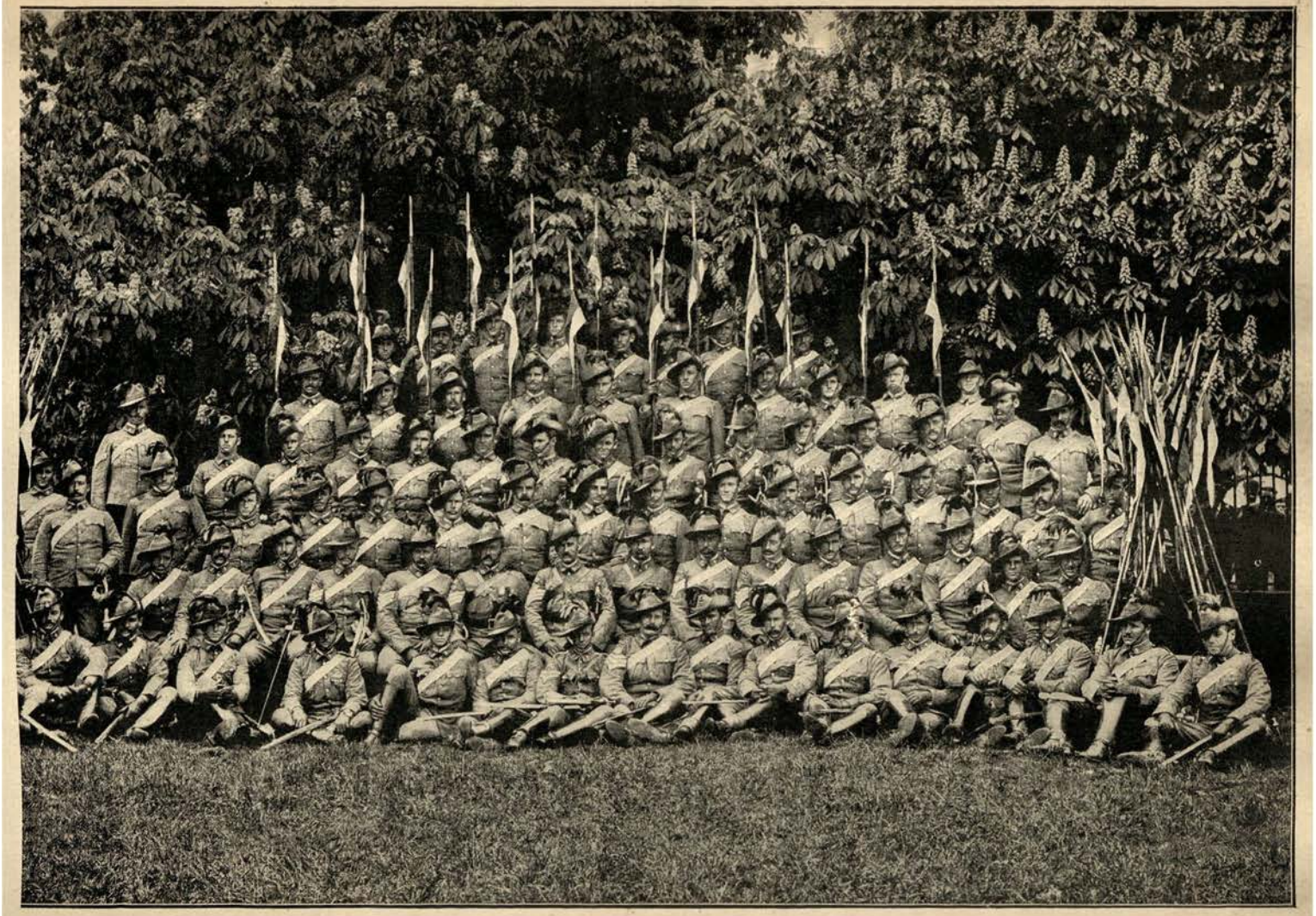
showed that the qualities of patriotism, self-sacrifice, and love of adventure still flourished amongst the people of the mother country, the Volunteers of Greater Britain were emblematic of a movement of wider significance set amidst more striking surroundings. The unique character of the British Empire had long been recognised in many of its aspects, but before the South African war it was still open to doubt how far this vast aggregation of states, comprising many races and many forms of government, could be reckoned as one unit for purposes of defence. And if that struggle cannot be said finally to have solved the problem, it has gone far to develop its essential features, to mark a new stage on the road of its history, and by the moral forces that it has awakened to break a way into regions before untrodden by the English peoples. The closing years of the nineteenth century must ever be counted a turning-point in the annals of the Anglo-Saxon race, since in them for the first time our Colonies found an opportunity of making practical trial of their strength, and of dedicating it to the interests of the Empire as a whole. That they will always do so in an equal measure it is as impossible to foretell as to deny that by their action they have recognised the existence of the Empire as a single entity. The importance of these considerations, as well as the military interest of the question, necessitates a digression from the history of events in South Africa, and justifies a brief description of the military institutions of our Colonies before the war, and the way in which the available material was employed, The results obtained in spite of hurried preparations and insufficient means afford some estimate of what may be achieved by foresight and proper organisation.

By slow and uncertain stages, as was inevitable in communities secure from external foes and scarcely grown to a sense of their own political importance, the defence forces of the Australian continent had been gradually augmented until, in the summer of 1899, they numbered 26,000 men maintained at an annual cost of £540,000. The work of the commandants sent out by the Imperial War Office during the last part of the century, and pushed forward in spite of many hindrances and discouragements, had gradually evolved a military system not ill-suited to the needs and capacity of the Colonies, but lacking that complete

development which a great and urgent crisis alone can ensure. Even now the importance of their work is inadequately recognised, and the belief is probably still widely spread that the contingents so formidable in South Africa sprang fully armed from the genius of the Australasian peoples. Such an idea is, of course, erroneous. The value of the different Colonial units varied according to the experience of their officers and the proportion of trained men within their ranks.

Around a small nucleus of Imperial officers were grouped a heterogeneous number of corps, divided as in England into regulars, militia, and volunteers. But the former, who numbered about one-thirteenth of the whole, were mainly represented by the technical services, such as Garrison Artillery and Engineers, and barely sufficed for the duties of coast defence. Commanded by officers who had attended the regular courses at Woolwich and elsewhere, recruited from exceptionally intelligent classes and reinforced by old soldiers from England, these companies certainly gave permanence to the military institutions of Australia, and set before less practiced corps a high standard of efficiency; while the presence of many of their members in the ranks of the contingents was of great value. But as a body they did not represent the type which has become so familiar in the annals of the war, and it is with the riflemen, mounted and dismounted, that we have mainly to deal.

The only regular field troops were the New South Wales Battery, raised in 1888, and described by Major-General French as "without exception the most complete and efficient unit that ever left Australia," and the New South Wales Army Medical Corps, consisting of a field hospital and three bearer companies, which did admirable service in Orange Free State. The cavalry, infantry, and Mounted Riflemen consisted entirely of militia and volunteers. The former, generally known as the partially paid force, numbered about 10,000 strong and comprised every arm of the service. Throughout Australia the character and composition of this body was essentially the same, though the terms of service, pay, and administration differed in the various colonies. In New South Wales the terms of service were three years with the colours and two with the reserve, or five with the colours. The training of the infantry was not, as in England, packed into one month, but spread



THE NEW SOUTH WALES LANCERS.

over the entire year, each man being required to do a certain number of drills for which he received pay equal to the current rate of wages. The maximum that a militiaman could earn was, in New South Wales, £9 12s., in Victoria £7 10s.; and many men put in attendances for which they received no payment. Every encouragement was given by the Government, which provided numerous drill-halls, gun-sheds, model rooms and reading-rooms; and athletic clubs, founded by the different corps, gave public displays and entertainments. The cost of the uniform and accoutrements was defrayed by the Government, each man providing his own kit and blankets while in camp.

The cavalry consisted of two regiments, both New South Wales corps—one of Lancers, and one of Australian Horse. The artillery lacked modern guns, and had to rely on dray-horses, and are still hampered by inferior equipment. The Engineers, who were at a similar disadvantage, were mainly recruited from the class of mechanics. The infantry battalions, numbering on a peace footing 400 men, were carefully trained in musketry. Unlike the English force, the Australian militia was mainly recruited from the towns.

The Volunteers of Australia were composed of infantry and mounted infantry, and numbered 14,000 strong. The former were recruited from the small rural townships, each furnishing a company or a half-company. Many were good riders; the Victorian Rangers, for example, were easily converted into Mounted Rifles after reaching South Africa. The Mounted Infantry Volunteers, which are represented in all the colonies, consisted mainly of men living up country, accustomed to horses and not unskilled in the arts of tracking and hunting. Each man provided his own horse and saddlery. The arms, accoutrements, and uniform were supplied as in the other auxiliary forces. Both infantry and mounted infantry went through a course of musketry, and with the former, though the number of compulsory drills were limited, a certain standard of efficiency was insisted on. The latter usually did a considerable number of extra drills, men often riding fifteen to twenty miles to the headquarters of the company. Their shooting, especially at unknown ranges, was fully up to the average. The horses bred on the farms were of a hardy stamp, accustomed to rough diet and the open air; in many districts they never saw the inside of a stable.

Two other institutions deserve mention—the Cadet Corps and the Rifle Clubs. These last were supplied by Government with arms and ammunition, and had to conform to State regulations. In some colonies they were given uniforms. In 1900, when the war-fever was at its height, the total membership probably amounted to about 30,000, over 14,000 being enrolled in Victoria alone. They were regarded as a kind of National Reserve, but underwent no military training, their chief object of course being to impart an elementary knowledge of the rifle. The Cadet Corps in Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania in some degree took the place of our own Public School Corps. In the last-named colony they were affiliated to the infantry battalions and batteries of Field Artillery.

The value of these various military institutions may, of course, be overrated. Probably the larger part of the men who went to South Africa had received no military training before the war. But this does not prove that trained men were not wanted. Amongst the later contingents the lack of such men and officers was severely felt, and only partially made good by the training camps at Randwick and other places. There can be little doubt that the necessity of relying upon the untrained intelligence considerably affected the value of some of the units. We do not think it too much to say that the rapidity with which the contingents were despatched and their efficiency in the field were mainly if not entirely due to the presence in Australia of experienced soldiers, who knew and appreciated the value of training and discipline as well as of intelligence, and also to the military tradition which the existence of the defence forces had implanted. Given these bases, much could be entrusted to the fine physique, keenness, and mode of life of the men, many of whom practically lived under service conditions. The chief obstacle to rapid mobilisation was a want of stores and modern weapons, a weakness which has not yet been made good. Australia has still no proper reserve of warlike stores nor arsenal, and is separated from her only base of supply by 12,000 miles of ocean.

Such was the condition of the military institutions of Australia when war broke out. Up till October 3rd only two colonies—New Zealand and Queensland—had offered contingents. Thanks mainly to the personal

vigour of their Premiers, these two had placed 200 and 250 Mounted Infantry at the disposal of the Imperial authorities in the early days of July. On July 11th both were provisionally, and on October 3rd definitely accepted by Mr. Chamberlain.

Victoria, West Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, and New South Wales followed the example of Queensland, and by October 18th the action of the executive had been sanctioned by the different Parliaments in nearly every case by overwhelming majorities. As early as September 28th a conference of commandants had met in Melbourne to formulate proposals for the despatch of a combined Australian contingent, representative of the future Commonwealth. Early in October a scheme was drawn up, the main points of which, though it was not carried into effect, are worth recording, for some of its conditions held good in the case of the separate contingents, and in one point, at least, the question of mounted and dismounted troops, the commandants showed greater foresight than the War Office.[1] It was agreed that the pay of privates should be 4s. 6d. a day, half of it to be deferred, that the force should include all arms, be strong enough to act as an independent body and contain a large proportion of mounted men. The staff was to consist of 30 officers, to be selected later; the artillery arm was to be represented by the New South Wales Battery; of the mounted men New South Wales was to supply 300, Victoria 198, Queensland 275 and a machine-gun section, South Australia 60; of the infantry, New South Wales 265, Victoria 345, South Australia 80, Tasmania 160, West Australia 160. New South Wales was also to send 60 Engineers. The grand total was 2,053, 833 being mounted men. The age limits were to be twenty and forty, single men and good shots preferred.

Scarcely had these items been decided on when the famous telegram arrived which overthrew the whole plan. The War Office asked for units of 125 men apiece, to consist of infantry, mounted infantry, or cavalry. All were to be armed with the ·303 rifle or carbine, which would be supplied if necessary by the Imperial Government. All were to provide their own equipment and bring their own horses. Each unit was to be commanded by one captain and three subalterns, and no officer higher than a major was to be sent.

[1] See, however, Appendix F.

The telegram continued thus :—

"In view of the numbers already available the infantry will be most serviceable, cavalry least serviceable. In considering the number which can be employed, the Secretary of State for War will be guided by the nature of the offers made and the desire that each colony should be fairly represented, and limits are necessary if the force is to be fully utilised. The available staff is to be regarded as an integral portion of the Imperial forces. He would gladly accept two units each from New South Wales and Victoria, and one from South Australia. . . . From the date of disembarkation the Imperial Government will provide pay at Imperial rates, supplies and ammunition, and will defray the expenses of transport back to the colony, and pay wound pensions and compassionate allowances at Imperial rates. The troops are to embark not later than October 31st, proceeding direct to Capetown for orders."

Referring to this telegram in the House of Commons, Mr. Wyndham ascribed the policy of single units to Sir Redvers Buller, saying that the General thought that by such means "it would be easier to give the Colonies what they desired—that was, an immediate place at the front." No doubt the British authorities were unwilling at that time to risk a body of partially untrained men, unleavened by regular troops, in face of the enemy. Perhaps, too, the fact that the Colonial forces had no trained staffs available for service abroad, and would have had to be supplied with staff officers from England at a time when such men were scarce, was another reason for the course pursued. A much more important factor was the then English estimate of the value of the Colonial troops. It is clear that the first contingents were accepted rather as symbolical and moral than as material aids. Each colony was to be "fairly represented"; it was not thought advisable that each should send to the aid of the mother-country as many men as it was able. As matters turned out, the decision to employ no considerable body of Australian troops under one commander proved, except for sentimental reasons—admittedly important ones—of no great consequence. Each unit went out as it was ready, and was sent where it was wanted, mainly to points on the line of communication, in guarding which it had time to learn its routine work thoroughly before undertaking more arduous duties. The

demand for infantry in preference to cavalry, though it throws a lurid light on the views of the War Office at this period,[1] was a natural corollary of the complete misapprehension as to the nature and extent of their task under which the British authorities laboured during the first months of the war. By the beginning of February every Australian in South Africa was mounted; and the first contingents were the only ones that contained infantry.

As soon as the wishes of the Imperial authorities were known, Australia bent all her energies to the preparation of her troops, and matters progressed so rapidly that by the end of November the whole of the first contingents had sailed, and some had already landed in South Africa.

The men of the New South Wales Lancer squadron, most of whom had volunteered, and who had passed through a training at Aldershot, were the first to reach Capetown. One troop joined Lord Methuen, the rest went to Naauwpoort, where by Christmas the squadron was united. The Mounted Rifles, a fine body of men which had been raised a few years previously by Major-General Hutton, furnished 100 men of all ranks, and to them were at first attached two officers and thirty-two men of the 1st Australian Horse. The combined squadron went up to De Aar in December; at the end of the year the Australian Horse were sent to Naauwpoort and incorporated with the Lancer squadron. The horses for these troops were partially composed of animals belonging to the Mounted Police. In accordance with the demands of the War Office, one company of infantry, 121 strong, selected from the ranks of four militia and four volunteer regiments, was landed in November and proceeded to Enslin. The last item of the New South Wales contingent was the first half of the Medical Corps, about eighty strong, provided with 50 beds, 17 waggons, and 53 horses. After remaining some weeks at Green Point this unit was sent to Orange River. The offer of "A" battery of the Field Artillery, strangely enough, was refused.

The first Victorian contingent consisted of an infantry company selected out of 450 trained militiamen, and a mounted rifle company, also

[1] See however Appendix G.

composed entirely of trained men. The cost of the horses averaged less than £15 apiece. The estimated cost of the contingent for six months was £30,000. Both companies went to Enslin.

Queensland held by her first offer and sent two good companies of mounted infantry under Major Ricardo. They sailed on November 1st,

FIRST SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CONTINGENT.

and numbered 14 officers, 256 men, and 300 horses. The men's kits cost £20 apiece, and the estimated expenditure for six months was £31,980. On reaching Capetown they were ordered to Belmont.

South Australia sent a company of infantry. The composition of its personnel is interesting. There were 21 permanent artillerymen, 35 infantrymen, 36 mounted rifles, 24 gunners, 5 reservists, and 20 civilians. It sailed on November 2nd, and joined the other Australians at Enslin.

Western Australia sent a similar unit under Captain Moor, R.A. Nearly all the men were townsmen, forty-eight trades being represented. The Tasmanian premier purposed to send a whole company of 160 of all ranks, and some 400 volunteers came forward, but at first only four officers and seventy-six men, specially chosen for their shooting, were accepted. Most of them belonged to country rifle corps. In January the remainder of the company—two officers and forty-five men—went out and joined their comrades and the Westralians at Enslin. The whole of the companies at that place were commanded by Colonel Hoad, of the Victorian Staff, and known as the Australian Regiment. Together with a few regular troops, the Queenslanders at Belmont and the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, under Captain Antill, at De Aar, they did good work in guarding Methuen's communications until the beginning of February, when they were sent to Rensburg. Here all the dismounted men were turned into Mounted Rifles, and as a large proportion of the men were already able to ride, the experiment proved very successful.

All, or nearly all, the first contingents had reached Africa before the Black Week; indeed, some anxiety was felt lest the fighting should be over before they reached the front. These apprehensions were terminated by the reverses of December. By that time the worth of irregular mounted troops had at last been recognised, and when at that critical period the Colonies again came to the help of the mother-country their offers were gladly accepted. The gravity of the situation gave fresh vigour to the movement, and before the end of the year all the second contingents were in process of organisation.

Again the idea of a conjoint Australian contingent was mooted, this time by Mr. Lyne, Premier of New South Wales, but was not completely carried out. New South Wales sent the fine battery which had before been refused. Unfortunately it never got a chance of distinguishing itself, its different sections being distributed along the line of communication at Enslin, Klokfontein, Belmont. Later on, to avoid breaking up a brigade division, it was requisitioned for service in the Prieska-Uppington district, where it remained, never firing a shot or seeing a shot fired, until much later in the campaign. The 1st Australian Horse sent a squadron of 5 officers and 100 men, and with the New South Wales Lancers were

attached to the Scots Greys. Most of the men had had the advantage of a year's training, including a nine days' continuous course of instruction. Before it had reached Capetown, three companies of Mounted Infantry, numbering 16 officers, 383 men, and 413 horses had landed, and were moving up to the front. This force was not drawn from any particular regiment of corps. The officers were furnished from the Artillery, Army Service Corps, and infantry, as well as from the mounted branches. Most of the men had never passed through a regular course of training ; the standard of shooting was low, and the medical test less severe than in the case of the first contingent, the reason, as stated in an interview by Major-General French, being that "we want men now who will be passed by the doctor as fit to go through a year's campaign." The strong point of these companies was their riding, though even this left something to be desired. Most of the volunteers brought their own horses, or received those of the Mounted Police; seventy-one were given by private persons. A large number of volunteers came forward. By December 27th over 1,500 men were available, and in the camp at Randwick arrangements were made for those who had passed the tests, but for whom there was no room in the companies, to continue their training, in case a third contingent was required. The three new companies were afterwards incorporated in one regiment with Antill's Mounted Rifles and the converted company of infantry. They joined Lord Roberts before Poplar Grove. As part of the second contingent, by special request of the Imperial authorities, went the second half of the Medical Corps. Sailing on January 27th, it was first ordered to Stormberg, and thence following the stream of advance to Modder River, when it established hospitals at Kimberley and along the road to Bloemfontein. The estimated cost of the whole contingent was £60,000.

Victoria's quota consisted of two companies of Mounted Rifles (14 officers, 250 men, 308 horses). The officers carried revolvers. The personnel was furnished by the Volunteer Corps, 104 belonging to the Mounted Rifles and 71 to the Rangers. The contingent reached Capetown on February 5th.

On January 13th a company of Mounted Infantry (6 officers, 146 men)

left Queensland. Sixty-four per cent. of the men had served in the defence forces. This company suffered severely from enteric, and upwards of 100 were afterwards employed on the railway and in police duties; the officers were given other work. South and West Australia each sent one company, both of which were in South Africa by the first week in March. Some idea of the difficulties to be surmounted in the last instance can be gathered from the report of the Commandant, Colonel Chippendall: "The horses for each company had to be purchased, broken and trained for service; the saddles, bridles, accoutrements, clothing, kits, &c., tendered for locally, with a limited market for such supplies. This, together with the training of one company after another for a continued period of seven months, was a great strain on a very limited staff."

Thus far the Australian contingents had been mainly recruited from the existing military organisations of the Colonies, and had taken recognised forms and titles.

In the last days of the year, however, a new movement was set on foot. A proposal, apparently emanating from Victoria, was made to form a corps of Bushmen. In Sydney a few private citizens started a subscription list for the raising, equipment, and dispatch of 500 horsemen, and on December 28th the Committee made its first appeal for horses to graziers and farmers. Height, in the opinion of the committee, was immaterial; small and sturdy horses used to rough country, and from five to twelve years of age, were needed. The railway department undertook to deliver consignments at the seaports free of charge. In a few days the movement had taken a wider and more definite form, Major Randal Carey, of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* Newspaper Company, proposing to raise a corps of Australian Bushmen, and to rely on public generosity for their equipment, quartering, and transport. The idea was taken up by Australians in London. Mr. Lyne consented to communicate with the other Australian Governments; all agreed to contribute their quota to the new force, and on January 10th regulations for raising it were issued. The qualifications were good character, good shooting, and good riding. It was at first proposed by Queensland that 5,000 men should be sent, each colony contributing on a population basis, but

ultimately this suggestion was given up. The movement was everywhere vigorously pressed, the money was forthcoming, and in the next two months the following detachments left Australia :—

		Officers.	Men.	Horses.
February 28th	New South Wales	30	499	529
March 10th	Victoria	15	261	357
March 1st	Queensland	14	298	352
March 3rd.	South Australia	6	94	120
February 27th	Tasmania	52		55
Later	Western Australia	7	109	—
Total { Officers and men }		1,383	Horses	1,413

The various contingents which went to make up this imposing total were never united under one commander. The New South Wales contingent, for instance, was sent to Beira, while one hundred of the Queenslanders marched with Mahon's column to the relief of Mafeking. The quality of the personnel varied considerably, but on the whole the force did not belie its name. The New South Wales contingent was almost entirely composed of Bushmen, "a corps of boundary riders, station-hands, fencers, shearers, and general roundabouts," representatives of all those occupations, in fact, which go to make up life in the backblocks of Australia. Many of the Victorians, on the other hand, were not genuine Bushmen, no less than fifty trades being represented in their ranks. They comprised Captain Cameron's Scouts, twenty-five in number, and were accompanied by ten paid nurses. The Queensland corps was chiefly composed of men from the western districts, who did not belong to the Queensland Defence Forces. Of the Tasmanian contingent half was paid for by the Government. The whole body carried a lighter equipment than the first of the Australian auxiliaries, an alteration which was thought to be warranted by the mode of life and experience of the men. The weak point in all the contingents was the want of experienced officers.

Perhaps nothing showed more clearly the spirit which inspired the Australian Colonies than the generosity of those who remained at home, and were therefore uninfluenced by the hopes of adventure and military renown, which naturally facilitated recruiting. The Australian

Bushmen were mainly raised and supported by public subscriptions. New South Wales contributed over £30,000, the other colonies in proportion. The Patriotic Fund, the proceeds of which were devoted to the supply of equipment, ambulances, and other necessaries, and to which Sydney subscribed £17,000 and Queensland £16,000,[1] the "More Men Fund" and others were opened at this time. The earlier contingents were equipped and paid by the Governments. Up to June 30th, 1900, Queensland alone had spent £147,532, her monthly payments averaging £6,000 on the same date (*i.e.*, at the close of the financial year). New South Wales had expended £157,985, and Victoria £60,931. Though the exact figures of the other Colonies are not available, it may be assumed that altogether the extraordinary expenses entailed by Australia's share in the war during the first eight months of hostilities nearly doubled her usual military expenditure.

The last of the Australian Bushmen had scarcely sailed when a new request was made by the British Government. On March 3rd Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed to the Premier of New South Wales that Her Majesty's Government required an additional force of 2,000 men of a similar kind to the Bushmen, and would undertake to defray all expenses, including a daily payment of 5s. per private. The formation of the new corps, which was known as the Imperial Bushmen, was authorised on March 13th, and once again the call was met with enthusiasm. At Melbourne no less than 7,000 men presented themselves as volunteers. The ultimate composition of the various contingents was as follows:—

Date of sailing.		Officers.	Men.	Horses.
April 23rd	... New South Wales	40	722	?
May 1st	... Victoria	31	598	778
?	... Queensland	32	366	512
May 1st	... South Australia	12	218	157
?	... Western Australia	7	119	?
?	... Tasmania, first contingent...	5	117	?
?	... „ second contingent	12	241	?
		139	2,381	?

[1] We have not found it possible to collect an entire list of the amounts subscribed to the different funds.

Like the rest of the Australian contingents, the corps reached South Africa in detachments and was never united. There is no doubt that the quality of its personnel was lower than that of the earlier troops, the class of men being inferior and the trained soldiers fewer. Many of its members, though perhaps a minority, were not bushmen at all. The discipline, at first at any rate, was inclined to be weak, and it took time to form the so-called regiment into really efficient units. Nevertheless, of one of these, Colonel A. M. Brookfield, speaking at the United Services Institution, was able to say, "It would have been quite possible to criticise them from a purely military standpoint, but finer mounted men for rough and ready warfare I do not think it would have been possible to see."[1]

The following table includes the various contingents already mentioned, and shows the number of officers, men, and horses sent each by the Australian Colonies during the first half of the year 1900:—

	Officers.	Men.	Total.	Horses.	Population.
New South Wales ...	159	2,525	2,689	2,560	1,356,650
Victoria	77	1,349	1,426	1,611	1,163,400
Queensland... ...	72	1,058	1,130	1,373	482,400
South Australia ...	32	543	575	548	370,700
Western Australia ...	25	450	475	401	171,030
Tasmania	16	287	303	192	182,300
	381	6,212	6,593	6,685	3,726,480

No colony showed more enthusiasm or won a higher reputation in the war than New Zealand. Like the Australian colonies, it possessed a small permanent force, composed of the staff and two companies of Garrison Artillery and Engineers, together with a considerable number of local volunteer corps, divided into mounted rifles, field artillery, naval artillery, infantry, and engineers. In a still higher degree than obtained in Australia, want of equipment, stores, and regular instruction handicapped its keener soldiers. Financial limitations and the various factors which militate against volunteer efficiency in England had been equally operative in the beautiful and prosperous colony. But in 1899 the possibility of war in South Africa acted as a strong stimulus, the enthusiasm for volunteering became very great, and

[1] Major-Generals Baden-Powell and Kekewich also bear witness to their good qualities.

on July 14, a few days after the offer of a contingent was provisionally accepted by Mr. Chamberlain, Colonel Penton wrote in his report, "Had their services been required, every man in the Forces would have come forward cheerfully and willingly to do his duty to the Empire." During the following year feeling rose to a high pitch, and offers to form corps became so numerous that even the large additions sanctioned constituted only a very small part of those which were proposed. No less than fifty offers to form new corps had to be refused.

When the preparation of the contingents began, the weak points of the New Zealand military system became evident. Experienced officers were badly wanted, and most of the men, never having served in the volunteer corps, lacked training. That they succeeded so well was due to their high intelligence and excellent spirit, as well as to the fact that the men of the country districts were commanded by officers whom they knew. The first contingent,[1] which consisted of two companies of Mounted Infantry, was commanded by Major Robin, instructor of mounted corps for the South Island. It numbered 10 officers and 200 men, and took with it 250 horses, twenty of which were given by private persons. The pay was 4s. per diem. The cost of the contingent was £20,000 for six months' service. It landed at Capetown on November 23rd, and joined French, who was then preparing to advance on Naauwpoort. On January 10th the second contingent, also consisting of two companies of the Mounted Infantry, left New Zealand. It numbered 15 officers, 228 men, and 300 horses, and was accompanied by four machine guns, the gift of the Armstrong Works. On the day when these companies embarked, the regulations for the Bushmen's Corps were promulgated in Australia. The possibility of a New Zealand equivalent was vigorously canvassed, and the sending of a third, fourth, and fifth contingent having been decided on, the name of Rough Riders was chosen as the designation of the new force. By the end of March all three detachments had sailed, numbering together 36 officers, 694 men, and 730 horses. The shooting test was not a high one, but Colonel Penton, very rightly, insisted on a certain standard in riding. The men went through some

[1] Offers by Maoris to form a contingent had to be refused.

hard work at Forbury Camp, and acquired some knowledge of drill, although their scouting feats, to judge from a contemporaneous account, scarcely showed that heaven-born aptitude which it is the fashion to attribute to every Colonial volunteer. The Rough Riders reached South Africa in April; by the beginning of August other contingents, known as the Imperial Service and Reserve, numbering 24 officers, 581 men, and 605 horses had also arrived; and nearly 600 remounts were sent, Canterbury supplying 150, Otago 230, and Southland 39, as free gifts. Of the 1,788 officers and men who composed the first contingents, 722 were equipped and horsed by public subscription. The personnel had been drawn from all trades and professions, many coming from the towns, but the larger proportion had received some training in the volunteer forces of the Colony. In the field they proved themselves second to none and perhaps superior to all the Colonial contingents. No small credit is due to the staff for the rapidity with which, in spite of great obstacles, they contrived to send out contingent after contingent in so efficient a state.

In Canada, as in Australia, popular enthusiasm ran high. Since the days of July when the first offer of Queensland and New Zealand had become known and the Canadian Parliament had unanimously passed the resolutions approving the Imperial policy, the desire that the largest of all the Colonies should take an active part in the conflict which was believed to be imminent had steadily increased amongst the English inhabitants of the Dominion. When war became inevitable, this feeling took a practical form in the offers of fifteen commanders of militia battalions and companies to raise troops for service in South Africa. Questions of domestic policy do not fall within the province of a purely military history, nor does space allows us to refer, except in the briefest terms, to the unfortunate division of opinion which arose between the colonists of French descent and their British compatriots. It was almost inevitable that some such difference of view should exist, that men who were Canadians first and British subjects afterwards should prefer the national to the Imperial view, and so come to be regarded as sympathisers with the enemy. The attitude of non-committal, by which Sir Wilfred Laurier hoped to remedy these opposing sentiments, only

accentuated them, and as time went on and the Government took no step to further the wishes of the great majority of the people, mutual recriminations drove both sides into deplorable extremes, exaggerating and distorting the real facts, and confusing the temporary and permanent factors of the question. One result of this was to give to the world at large a wrong impression of the positions of the best representatives of either section; another and a more desirable one was to elicit statements of the Colonial and Imperial points of view, such as no other Colony, not even New Zealand, contributed at this time to the great question of Imperial Federation. No doubt Sir Wilfred Laurier keenly appreciated the importance of the precedent which military co-operation on the part of Canada would form; indeed his speeches after the contingent were sent show that his policy was not one of vulgar opportunism. He declared with emphasis that Canada's freedom of choice was in no way impaired by her action in regard to South Africa, and he based his justification for the course he had adopted on the unmistakable expression of the wishes of the majority. This was true enough. The only complaint that can be urged against the Premier by the most ardent Imperialist was his tardy realisation of the state of public opinion and of the dangers which might result from hesitation. So tardy, indeed, was his action, that one is tempted to ask how soon his doubts would have been dissipated if Mr. Chamberlain had not telegraphed to the Governor-General his acceptance of the unofficial offers of the militiamen.

On the 3rd of October, the very day on which the offers of Queensland and New Zealand had been accepted, the Colonial Secretary telegraphed to Lord Minto as follows:—"Secretary of State for War and Commander-in-Chief desire to express high appreciation of signal exhibition of patriotic spirit of people of Canada shown by offers to serve in South Africa." Continuing he proceeded to detail the conditions of service and the organisation of the force, stated that four units of 125 men each would be gladly accepted, and concluded: "Inform accordingly all who have offered to raise volunteers."

This message, which was laid by the Governor-General before the Ministers, placed them in a difficulty. It obliged them to choose

between undertaking the equipment of a contingent and declining to give effect to Mr. Chamberlain's note. The decision was made the more awkward by the appearance on the very same day of an article in the *Military Gazette*, purporting to emanate from the Headquarters Staff at Ottawa, which stated that in case of war the Canadian Government would offer a contingent. This intention Sir Wilfred Laurier immediately disavowed, stating in an interview those considerations which rendered deliberation necessary. But this utterance did not satisfy the public, and, although the contents of Mr. Chamberlain's dispatch were kept secret, the agitation on both sides increased to an alarming extent between October 4th and October 12th, during which time the Premier was absent from Ottawa. Not till the 13th did the Government take the decisive step and issue the Order in Council recommending the equipment of 1,000 men.

The defence forces of Canada, as in the other Colonies, consisted of a small permanent force and a large body of practically untrained men, the latter unprovided with stores, arms or equipment sufficient for mobilisation. The former comprised two troops of Royal Canadian Dragoons, three batteries of artillery, and four companies of infantry, altogether 986 men. It supplied the Administrative Staff and a school of instruction to the Militia, which was divided into Active Militia, *i.e.*, those who were embodied for sixteen days in each year, either by voluntary enlistment or by ballot, and the Militia Reserve, which comprised all male inhabitants between the ages of eighteen and sixty who were British subjects by birth or naturalisation. The establishment of the former on June 30, 1899, was 36,650 men and officers.[1] The annual Militia expenditure was $2,489,551, the time of service in the Militia and the permanent force was three years. The contingent was ultimately paid at the Active Militia rates, and after disembark-

[1] This total was made up as follows:—

9 regiments, 1 squadron and 2 troops of Cavalry.
15 batteries of Field Artillery.
5 battalions and 9 companies of Garrison Artillery.
2 companies of Engineers.
91 battalions and 6 companies of Infantry.
Army Service Corps and Field Hospitals.

ing in South Africa, when the Imperial Government provided pay at ordinary British rates, the difference between that and the Canadian wage (rather more than double the British) was accumulated as a fund to be used at the discretion of the Government for the relief of families or dependents, or to be handed to the soldier on his return.

It will be noticed that the Canadian authorities had decided to send not the separate companies suggested by the Imperial War Office, but an entire battalion. The consent of the British authorities to this arrangement, which was infinitely more palatable to the people of Canada, was obtained, and on October 14th orders were issued for the enrolment of the men in the twelve military districts. The time of service was for six months, or with liability to extension for one year. The Government supplied everything until the troops landed in South Africa. Lieut.-Colonel Otter, a soldier of varied experience, was placed in command, and the other officers were chosen by the Government, with the advice of the military authorities. These were selected in a week. As soon as the captains were appointed, enrolment for each company began. Both men and officers of the Permanent Force were allowed to volunteer, and a very valuable element they must have been. It had been stipulated that every man should be trained and a fairly good shot; but if the *Montreal Daily Witness* is to be believed, this standard was not reached: "It is no disparagement to the Second (Special Service) Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment to say that it left Canada anything but an efficient military unit. It includes many of the very best officers in Canada, a few who should never have gone; . . . as good a lot of staff-sergeants and colour-sergeants as any regiment in the Imperial service has, and a sturdy, intelligent lot of privates with various degrees of military training, quite an appreciable number with absolutely none at all. As a fine-looking and altogether admirable body of men they are a credit to Canada, but they are not a military unit fit to take the field as such, and will not be for months to come." This was written on November 1st, two days after the battalion sailed from Quebec, and probably was no unfair description. Four months later they acquitted themselves creditably at Paardeberg. Without an admirable spirit and good leadership, this change could

A GROUP OF CANADIAN INFANTRY.

never have taken place.[1] The want of trained soldiers was in the main due to the fact that there were very few such in Canada. The number of volunteers in most of the districts far exceeded the number of men required, but the standard of military knowledge and experience even in these was low. In others the total number of men demanded were not furnished, notably in Quebec, where the French population were hostile to the movement. The standard of size had here to be slightly lowered in order "to secure a fair representation of that element of the population." Everything considered, however, the raising, equipment and concentration of the battalion in one fortnight was a very remarkable performance, especially when the vast distances to be traversed by the different companies are considered. The men from Victoria and Vancouver spent nearly six days in the train.

The first contingent left Quebec on the afternoon of October 30th, amid scenes of great enthusiasm. On November 2nd the Canadian Government offered a second. But the British Government, in spite of the investment of Ladysmith, still hoped that Sir Redvers Buller's advance would decide the war, and the offer was not accepted till December 16th,[2] the day on which the Empire began the war afresh.

[1] Colonel Otter's report, Toronto, January 26, 1901:—"By the time of our arrival at Cape Town I was able to form an estimate of the material of which the battalion was composed, an opinion which I have not since had reason to change. With the exception of the permanent corps, and a few others, none had much idea of duties, interior economy or discipline. In drill there were many well qualified, but I was astonished to find many ignorant of the first principles."

After referring to the good spirit shown by all ranks, and the importance of the lectures given and the work performed during the voyage, he says, "A great deal still remained to be done before it [the battalion] was fitted for the field." He ascribes its ultimate success to the physique and high intelligence of the personnel, lays great stress on the value of the two months' training on the line of communications, but adds that the creation of the spirit of discipline was a more difficult matter than the teaching of drill or duties.

On p. 14 of the Supplementary Report, Colonel Otter states that it was a question, on the eve of Magersfontein, whether the 1st Gordons or the Canadians should be sent to join Lord Methuen. As we know this was decided in favour of the Gordons, "an incident," adds the Colonel, "greatly to the advantage of the Royal Canadians, who were not at that time so well prepared to go into action as they ultimately became."

[2] It may be questioned whether on political grounds alone the first refusal was not a blunder. The larger the number of Colonists in the field, the greater the gain to the cause of Imperial unity.

The War Office now asked for Mounted Infantry, but left the composition of the force to the judgment of the Canadian authorities, who decided to send a regiment of Mounted Rifles and a brigade division of Field Artillery. The former was divided into two battalions of two squadrons each.[1] The first battalion, recruited mainly from the cavalry, Permanent and Militia, was called the Royal Canadian Dragoons; the second, consisting largely of the North-West Frontier Policemen, was ultimately known as the Canadian Mounted Rifles. The Dragoons were commanded by Colonel Lessard, who joined at Capetown; the Mounted Rifles by Commissioner Herchmer, of the Police. The squadrons numbered altogether 742 officers and men, and 750 horses, and each battalion was accompanied by two galloping Maxims. The physical standard and conditions of service were the same as for the first contingent, but the men were paid at the police rate, 75 cents per diem per private. The height of the horses was to be between 15 and 16 hands, their age between 5 and 10 years; and they carried, in addition to the weight of their rider, about 105 lbs., or about 10 lbs. less than our light cavalry.

The personnel of the batteries, numbered C, D, and E, was formed of men of the permanent force and militiamen who had served at least one training; one half of the officers belonged to the former organisation, the other half to the militia. The guns were 12-pounders, which had been purchased at Woolwich by the Canadian Government at the time of the Venezuelan crisis, and the establishment per battery was 174 officers and men, and 137 horses. The brigade division was under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Dury. The second contingent was to have sailed in one month after the order for its formation had been issued, but it was delayed by want of transport, and the last ship conveying the Canadian Dragoons and C Battery did not sail until February 21st. The other batteries and the Canadian Mounted Rifles,

[1] The proposed organisation of the mounted troops, as telegraphed by the Governor-General on December 21st, was: "Three squadrons Mounted Rifles carefully chosen for shooting and riding, and a fourth squadron of specially selected scouts from the North-West Territories. Strength of squadron 160. . . ." "Owing to unforeseen difficulties as regards recruiting in the North-West Territories," the two-battalion organisation was adopted on December 27th.

together with the Canadian Postal Corps, reached Capetown on February 17th and February 25th. Nearly 5,000 men had volunteered to serve with the second contingent, and almost all those selected, especially the men of the 2nd Battalion of Mounted Rifles, were of exceptionally fine quality.

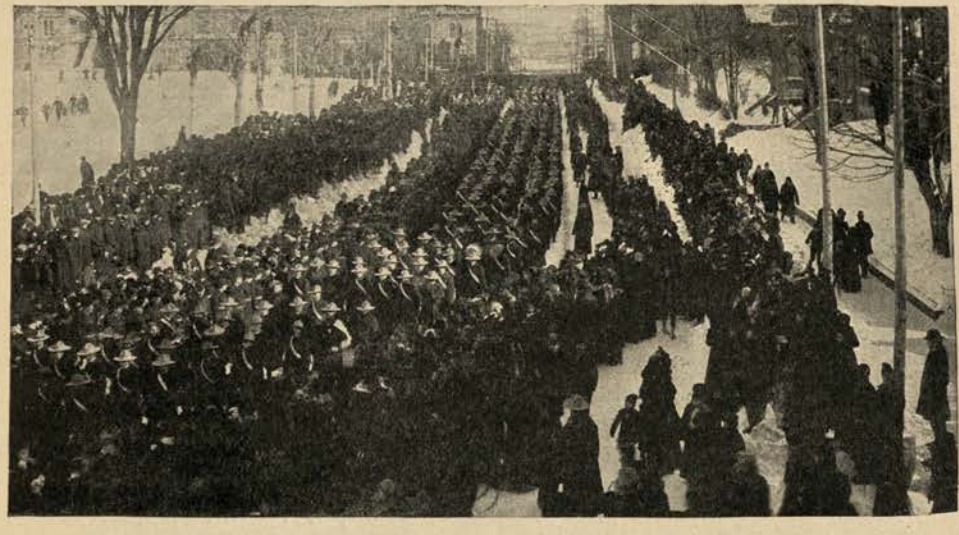
The raising of a Special Service Battalion to take the place of the Leinster regiment at Halifax, when the latter sailed for South Africa, was the last step initiated by the Canadian Government in support of the British cause during the year 1900. But before it was raised a typical Canadian Corps had left the shores of the Dominion. On January 11th Lord Strathcona, Agent-General of Canada, made an offer to equip and land in South Africa a corps of Rough Riders, to be raised in Manitoba, British Columbia, and the North-West Territories. Two days later the proposal was accepted by the War Office; the Canadian Government undertook the organisation, and on February 5th recruiting commenced. Any man who could ride and shoot well, and who was up to the physical standard, was eligible; no expense was spared, and when on March 16th the corps embarked at Halifax, it was the best equipped of those that had left Canada. It took with it three Maxims and one pom-pom. Its commander was Lieutenant-Colonel (late Inspector) Steele, eight of the other officers being also North-West Mounted Policemen;[1] and in the three squadrons which formed his command were "all the kinds of men to be found in the North-West—owners of ranches, cow-punchers, miners, men of the towns, men of the country, rich men, poor men, immigrants and native-born."

The Horse sailed for South Africa with 537 officers and men, and 548 horses. In defraying the cost of the equipment, horsing, pay and transport to Capetown, and after their arrival the difference between

[1] How well-fitted the North-West Policemen were for South African work may be judged from the words of Commissioner Herchmer: "We build all our own small posts, do our own waggon-repairing, blacksmithing, harness-repairing, painting, &c., besides taking the census when required, collecting customs, acting as timber, fire, and game guardians, issuing seed grain and relief to indigent settlers, taking charge of quarantine against man and beast, administering the Contagious and Infectious Diseases Acts, and keeping track of the movements of the population, &c., while a large proportion of the work usually done by police magistrates is performed by our officers." The Commissioner had once been in the 46th Regiment, and had seen service in India.

Imperial and Canadian rates of pay, Lord Strathcona expended a sum of over $1,000,000.

The English of India and Ceylon also sent their quota of men to South Africa. Little more than a week after Colenso the offer of a contingent from Ceylon had been accepted, and on January 23rd four officers and 125 men mobilised at Colombo. Many of them were planters, some had been trained in the Ceylon Mounted Rifles; all were required to be good riders and shots. The equipment was provided from the Madras arsenal, but sixty-six members of the



STRATHCONA'S HORSE.

company brought their own horses. They were paid at Imperial rates. In India, the Governor-General on February 11th sanctioned the formation of a corps of Mounted Infantry at Calcutta, and placed it under the command of Colonel Lumsden, of the Assam Valley Light Horse. The establishment was fixed at 250 men, and preference was given to volunteers, bachelors under forty, and those who could provide their own horses. The terms of service were for one year, or for the duration of the war. As in the case of the Ceylon contingent, the men were nearly all planters; fifty-seven of the Behar Light Horse, well trained as scouts, joined the corps, and fourteen men of the East

Indian Railway Corps formed a Maxim detachment; the officers carried carbines, the men Lee-Metford rifles and bayonets. The cost of equipment was defrayed by subscriptions, the commanding officer himself bearing no small part of the expense. Arms, ammunition, and transport were supplied by the Indian Government. The two companies sailed on February 26th and March 3rd.

Not the least remarkable of the practical expressions of loyalty which this time brought forth was the action of the native princes of India. Of that strange assemblage of States, to whose fringes a century and a half ago had clung the seemingly insignificant settlements of British merchants, many had disappeared. But it is a fact upon which Englishmen may dwell with much satisfaction and no small wonderment, that at the end of a century, of which the earlier years saw Assaye and Chillianwallah, and the middle years the defeat of a most dangerous if limited rebellion, the descendants of those who had been our fiercest opponents or our wavering allies should have come forward with offers of assistance, not to repel a northern invader, but to take part in a distant contest, the final result of which could only have affected them as constituents of the Empire. When it was known that the native armies of India would not be employed, the independent princes gave splendid presents of horses. Amongst them were the Nizam of Hyderabad, the rulers of the old Mahratta state of Gwalior and the Sikh province of Jodhpore, and the Rajah of Mysore, potentates whose names in the minds of Englishmen are more closely associated with the idea of hostility than that of alliance.

Altogether by the end of July, 1900, the various Colonial contingents, other than South African, had placed in the field a force of 550 officers and 11,034 men, consisting almost entirely of mounted men, and thus doubling our strength in that all-important arm.

As was natural, the forces raised in South Africa itself were nearly equal to the combined total of Yeomen, Volunteers, and over-sea Colonials. The Natal Government, which from the outset was less hampered by the fear of offending the so-called loyal Dutch, had supported and encouraged the raising of local corps, and so hearty had been

the response that, early in 1900, 3,500[1] Volunteers belonging to that Colony were taking their part in its defence, while 1,600 stretcher-bearers were accompanying Buller's Relief Column on the banks of the Tugela. In Rhodesia Colonel Baden-Powell had early raised the two Protectorate Regiments, which alone rendered the defence of Mafeking feasible. Besides Colonel Plumer's Mounted Infantry, the Rhodesian Regiment, which joined him later, and the Volunteer Corps which defended Kimberley, there existed in Cape Colony prior to the outbreak of hostilities a large number of rifle clubs and local defence organisations, as well as those fine corps, the Cape Mounted Rifles and Cape Police, which were chiefly engaged in patrolling the Orange River frontier. But political considerations had largely interfered with the development of the military strength of the Colony. Mr. Schreiner, believing no doubt that the Boers would be easily dealt with by the regular army, and fearing lest the embodiment of local corps should rouse the racial animosities of the Cape Dutch, had strenuously opposed the active employment of the large mass of patriotic Colonists who demanded a share in the campaign. The Bond Ministry had steadily discountenanced any volunteer movement, and the Cape Riflemen and Police,[2] scattered throughout the frontier districts, had been unable to render services worthy of their united strength and excellence. General Buller, indeed, had fully recognised the value of this Colonial material, and the first two regiments of Brabant's Horse, the Railway Pioneer Regiment and the South African Light Horse, were initiated by him and owed much to his help and encouragement. Part of the latter corps, like the Imperial Light Horse, which only had been organised after much opposition, went to Natal, while part of Brabant's men joined Gatacre; but their numbers were limited, and although many of the local Rifle Clubs were named for active service and placed under the orders of the General-in-Chief, comparatively little progress had been made in developing the

[1] This does not include the Imperial Light Horse, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, and Bethune's Mounted Infantry, together 1,500 strong, who were mostly composed of refugees and held their own with the best of the Imperial troops at Ladysmith and on the Tugela, or the Imperial Light Infantry, 1,000 strong, also partially composed of refugees and raised in Natal.

[2] The Cape Police in 1895 numbered 48 officers, 798 N.C.O.'s and men (whites), and 416 natives.

defensive strength of the Colony, until the disasters of December, the advance of the enemy into Cape Colony, and the wholesale defection of the northern Dutch, demonstrated at once the insufficiency of our forces, the disloyalty of those whose feelings we had tried to spare, and the falsity of the hope that the struggle could be limited to the territory of the Republics. Schreiner's position was no longer tenable; the outcry of the loyal Colonists grew louder, and when Lord Roberts arrived on January 10th he was able to make full use of the raw material which General Buller's efforts had placed ready to his hand and to give a fresh impulsion to a movement which in a few weeks considerably increased our effective strength, and at the beginning of August had placed in the field some 20,000 men.

A week after the Commander-in-Chief had arrived orders were sent out for the formation of a Colonial Division under Colonel Brabant, whom local knowledge, experience, and personality marked as its most suitable leader and organiser. He was given the local rank of Major-General, and his headquarters fixed at Queenstown. There were several good reasons why this town was chosen. In the first place, the district held by Gatacre since the day of Stormberg was still the most exposed point of the British line of defence. The districts north of Dordrecht were occupied by the enemy, and the main force under the General himself was comparatively weak in cavalry. The infection of revolt seemed likely to spread southward as well as eastward, and the sturdy patriotism of the old colony of Kaffraria, whose inhabitants had been most vehement in urging that they should be allowed to defend themselves, offered a convenient recruiting ground for the new division. Town Guards had already been organised at East London and King William's Town. Out of a total of 5,000 disposable men, 500 had volunteered for service outside Cape Colony, and 1,800 were already enrolled in Cape corps. These last were destined to form the nucleus of the division under General Brabant, of which the proposed composition was as follows:—

Staff	28
1st Regiment Brabant's Horse (already serving at Pen Hoek)	500
2nd Regiment „ „	550

Cape Mounted Rifles (at Bird River)	450
Kaffrarian ,, ,, (with Gatacre)	550
Border Horse	485
Queenstown Rifle Volunteers (including Driscoll's Scouts 60)	300
Royal Engineers	14
Cape Artillery	135
Divisional Police, Transport, Ambulance and Commandeering	154

Attached to Division:—Four 15-pdr. B.L. field guns, two 7-pdr. R.M.L. guns, two 12-pdr. B.L. Naval guns, one 13-pdr. Hotchkiss B.L. field gun, five ·303 Maxims.

Had the division been completed and maintained in the above form it would have numbered over 3,000 horses. As a matter of fact the average strength in men and horses was about 2,800, and in June we find General Brabant at the head of 1,297 men only. Like every other large unit its main body was diminished by detachments[1] and losses; but the decrease seems to have been mainly due to the fact that many of the men had only been enlisted for service inside Cape Colony, and consequently did not cross the Orange River. However, there can be no doubt as to the value of the distinctive Colonial organisation as a stimulus to recruiting. The British Cape farmers, from which class most of the men came, trained in the rough and ready school of border warfare like the Boers, disliked, as did their enemies, the strict discipline and organisation imposed on regular troops and at first were inclined to distrust the leading of the British officer. Those of their leaders who belonged to the regular army were for the most part men chosen for their ability and tact, who could give the newly organised corps the benefit of their experience without rousing Colonial susceptibilities.

Lord Roberts did not confine himself to the raising of a Colonial Division. Not only did his presence and encouragement strongly stimulate local enlistment and organisation throughout Cape Colony, but by his orders two more regiments of South African Horse were formed, called respectively Roberts's Horse and Kitchener's Horse. The first squadron of the former left Cape Town for the front on January 19th, the first of the latter on January 31st, and in the end they each

[1] Queensland Rifle Volunteers and 2nd Brabant's Horse were detached in June; the former to Rundle, the latter to Clements. See for history of Colonial Division, Chapter XVI.

numbered about 500 strong. The Commander-in-Chief's bodyguard was also formed of men chosen from the various local bodies.

The value of these different corps must have varied considerably, according to their component elements and officers. Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse were made up largely of men residing in Capetown, refugees from Johannesburg and elsewhere, but they were stiffened by several companies of volunteers from East London, Grahamstown, and Port Elizabeth, and largely commanded by British officers. Many of the men who joined the regiments came from the coast towns, and were comparatively unused to horses; the up-country corps were more akin to the Boer in their methods of life, and belonged to local rifle organisations. The Railway Pioneer Regiment deserves more than a passing notice. It was mainly composed of Uitlanders, and proved of immense value as more and more men were needed to work the increasing lengths of railway in our possession. Originally limited to one battalion and organised in the face of much discouragement, it was ultimately raised to four; but the expansion came too late to obtain the services of many first-rate men, who, by that time, had gone home. The chief originator was Louis Seymour, the ablest engineer on the Rand, who died gallantly in a small engagement on the Zand River in June, 1900.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN LIGHT HORSE.

The Colonial troops may be divided roughly into two classes. There were, first, the mounted corps, and a few infantrymen who served at the front and must be reckoned as part of the field army. Behind them were the various local organisations, destined for the purposes of local defence, but supplying the corps at the front with many recruits. The equipment of these large bodies of men was anything but uniform. Even the arms were of different patterns, and in the hurry of the moment the clothing was of all

sorts and descriptions. Some of the corps, but for the rudimentary tactical training which they received, might have been taken for a Boer commando. But thanks to the perseverance of the men and the energy of the officers the grand object was attained, and a large force of Mounted Infantry, much of it fully capable of dealing with the pick of the burghers, was organised and thrown upon the frontier of the Free State in March and April. It is impossible to get an accurate estimate of the numbers of these different corps, owing to constant variations, want of proper staff control, and the fact that the stationary organisations were the main recruiting depôts of the active force, but their strength on February 15th was approximately as follows:—

	Stationary.			
Cape Town	Duke of Edinburgh's Rifles ...	1,189		
	Cape Garrison Artillery ...	566		
	Cape Town Highlanders ...	464		
				2,219
Port Elizabeth (Prince Alfred's) Guards				518
East London Rifles (Kaffrarian)				678
Grahamstown 1st City Volunteers				560
Uitenhage Rifles				200
Komgha Mounted Rifles				100
Transkei „ „				125
Xalanga Border Mounted Rifle Corps				72
Tembaland „ „				52
Engcobo „ „				47
Cape Medical				200
		Total ...		4,771
	Field Force.			
Bayly's Horse[1]				450
Nesbitt's Horse				400
Cape Police				800
Brabant's Division				3,000
Roberts's Horse				500
Kitchener's Horse				500
Orpen's Horse				300
Griqualand Mounted Rifles				1,200
Railway Pioneers				750
		Total ...		7,900

[1] Raised by Colonel Bayly. This corps found their own horses, and food for themselves and animals. Their pay was 12s. per diem. See for further notes on South African Corps Appendix H.

The stationary part of the Colonial force, though they took little part in the fighting, were of great value in several ways, as recruiting centres, as guarantees against any attempt at a Dutch rising, as a protection to the lines of communication, and generally as imparting a feeling of security throughout the loyalist part of the population.

Such a guarantee was badly needed. The reverses of December, the lengthy immobility of the British forces along the Orange River, the increasing difficulties of the besieged at Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking, and the growing unrest along the frontier from Barkly East to Hopetown made the period of inaction terribly trying to the loyalists, shook the faith of the waverers, and increased the insolence of the invaders and the number of the rebels. Writing to the Colonial Secretary on January 16th, Sir Alfred Milner expressed the opinion that about 10,000 Cape Dutch had joined the Boers. In the interior of the Colony the Bond Press were embarking on a scurrilous crusade against the High Commissioner. Later on, the arrival of British reinforcements and the evident impotence of the burghers to drive the British from their positions near the Orange River forced the Africanders to new tactics. They then raised the "peace at any price" cry, the local branches of the South African Conciliation Committee passed resolutions condemning the policy of the British Government, and the Dutch Reformed Church, joining in the movement, almost abandoned its pastoral work to take up the functions of a political agency. More violent measures were apprehended, and on the night of January 1st the guards were trebled in Cape Town to meet the possibility of a rising. Writing nearly five weeks later, Lord Roberts remarks: "A serious feeling of unrest prevailed. The withdrawal of so large a portion of the Army Corps had encouraged the disloyal amongst the inhabitants, and I found that His Excellency the High Commissioner was extremely anxious as to whether it would be possible to preserve peace and order throughout the province." Just before the commencement of the advance on Kimberley, Sir Alfred Milner again expressed his fears of a rising in the Colony, a fact which sufficiently indicates the tension under which the population and the Government had lived during the nine weeks which intervened between Magersfontein and the commencement

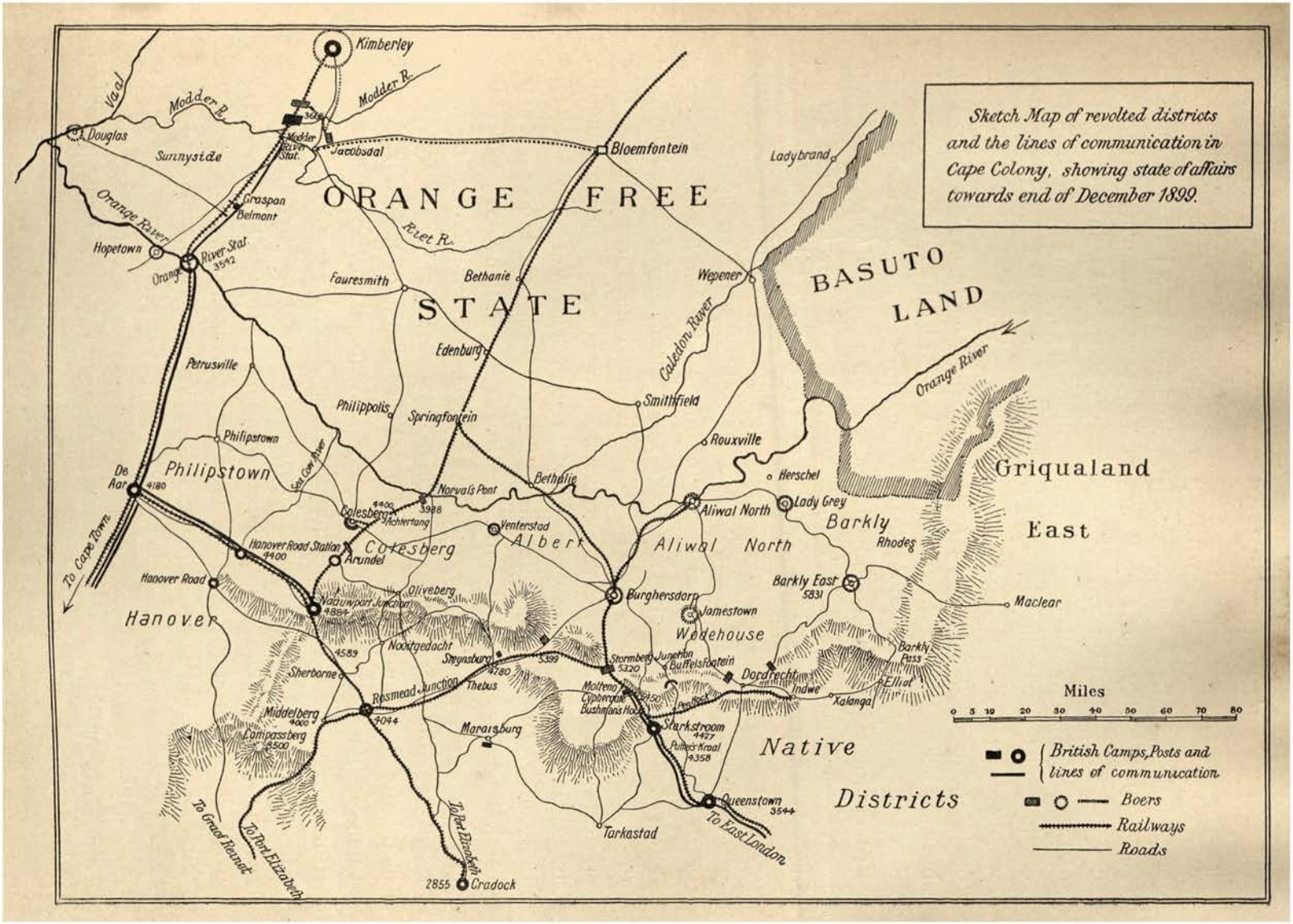
of Lord Roberts's movement. Indeed, had the enemy during that period succeeded in defeating one of the English forces south of the Orange River, such a rising might easily have taken place. It is to the history of these scattered columns, upon which the safety of the Colony depended from the middle of December to the middle of February, that we must now turn our attention.

CHAPTER VII

FRENCH'S OPERATIONS AT NAAUWPOORT AND RENSBURG (NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER)

STATE OF AFFAIRS IN CAPE COLONY AFTER THE BLACK WEEK—WANT OF VIGOUR ON THE PART OF THE BOERS—A GREAT OPPORTUNITY LOST—FRENCH'S ORDERS AND POSITION—TROOPS AT FIRST UNDER FRENCH—RECONNAISANCES TOWARDS ARUNDEL—AND TO THE SOUTHWARD—FRENCH REINFORCED MOVES ON ARUNDEL—CAPTURE OF ARUNDEL—SUBSEQUENT SKIRMISHES—FRENCH AGAIN REINFORCED—THREATENS ENEMY'S FLANKS—SUDDEN RETIREMENT OF BOERS ON COLESBERG

GREAT as had been the blunders of the Boers in Natal after the investment of Ladysmith, their incapacity for vigorous offensive action was nowhere more clearly shown than in Cape Colony after Stormberg and Magersfontein. The condition of affairs upon which they had founded their hopes of final success actually existed. Of three British forces which had advanced up the three main lines of communication, the largest had been bloodily repulsed, and lay on the Modder River inactive and disheartened. The second in importance had sustained losses amounting to nearly one-third of its available infantry, and had fallen back under circumstances so discouraging as to make the retention of Bushman's Hoek and Sterkstroom seem an act of daring. Both these forces needed reorganisation and reinforcements, and for a time were incapable of offensive operations. Between them, but separated from the Modder by nearly 200 miles of exposed railroad, and from Sterkstroom by at least 100 miles of rugged country, stood a small force at Naauwpoort. Reliable information was scarcely to be had. From the Modder to Hopetown, and throughout the wide belt of territory between the Orange River and the mountain barrier to which the two eastern British columns were clinging, the


Sketch Map of revolted districts and the lines of communication in Cape Colony, showing state of affairs towards end of December 1899.
ORANGE FREE STATE
BASUTO LAND
Griqualand East
Native Districts
Kimberley
Vaal
Modder R.
Douglas
Sunnyside
Modder River Stat.
Jacobsdal
Bloemfontein
Ladybrand
Orange River
Graspan
Belmont
Hopetown
Orange River Stat. 3542
Riet R.
Fauresmith
Bethanie
Wepener
Caledon River
Edenburg
Petrusville
Philippolis
Springfontein
Smithfield
Orange River
Philipstown
Rouxville
De Aar 4180
Sea Cow River
Norval's Pont
Bethulie
Herschel
Colesberg 4400 Achtertang 3988
Aliwal North
Lady Grey
Venterstad
Barkly
Rhodes
To Cape Town
Hanover Road Station 4400
Arundel
Colesberg
Albert
Aliwal North
Hanover Road
Oliveberg
Burghersdorp
Barkly East 5831
Maclear
Nauuwport Junction 4884
Hanover
Jamestown
Wodehouse
Nooitgedacht
Steynsburg 4780
5399
Stormberg Junction 5320
Buffelsfontein
Barkly Pass
4589
Sherborne
Thebus
Molteno
Cyphergate
Bushmans Hoek
Dordrecht
Indwe
Elliot
Xalanga
Rosmead Junction
Middelberg 4000
4044
Compassberg 8500
Maraisburg
Starkstroom 4427
Pulleis Kraal 4358
Queenstown 3544
To East London
Tarkastad
To Graaf Reinet
To Port Elizabeth
To Port Elizabeth
2855 Cradock
Miles
0 5 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80
British Camps, Posts and lines of communication
Boers
Railways
Roads

whole land was seething with open rebellion. The Dutch population of Colesberg, Aliwal North, Albert, Wodehouse, and Barkly East had gone over bodily to the Boers. South of the mountains reigned disaffection and dismay. Loyalists were trekking into the interior of the Colony; the disloyal were confidently expecting a fresh advance of their victorious allies. The initiative had passed for the moment wholly into the hands of our enemies. With all the advantages of information, mobility, and local knowledge on their side, encouraged by the belief that their armies would be recruited with every mile they advanced, they should have concentrated against each of the British forces in turn, and, driving them back along their divergent communications, struck directly at Cape Town. Had Cronje detached a portion of his force towards Bethulie,[1] keeping Methuen occupied by sending raiding parties against his communications, five or six thousand Boers might have been suddenly thrown upon Gatacre or French, whose combined forces in the middle of December did not equal that number, and who could not possibly have united in time to meet a rapid blow. Had the Free State forces then been what they afterwards became and had they been commanded by a single vigorous leader; had Christian De Wet then possessed the authority and acted with the energy for which he became noted in the later stages of the war,[2] the British arms might have suffered a loss of territory and prestige which would have fatally deferred the relief of Kimberley, and could only have been regained by many months of hard and perilous warfare. This inability of the Boer leaders to make use of the state of affairs in December, whether due to their own want of courage or insight, or, as is at least as probable, to the exhaustion caused by their defensive efforts and the indiscipline of their followers, was of decisive importance. The confidence of their supporters sank; the enthusiasm evoked by their successes died away; and the British were enabled to maintain their position

[1] As later on he did to Colesberg. French, however, was then too strong to be meddled with.

[2] In his "Three Years War" De Wet says that he and De la Rey proposed to attack Methuen's communication with 1,500 men, but that Cronje refused on the ground that by so doing he would weaken his force at Magersfontein.

until the advance of Lord Roberts finally wrenched the control of the initiative out of his enemy's hands.

Yet the Boer operations against Gatacre or Methuen would certainly have been more vigorous had not their central commandos around Colesberg been held in an iron grip by the incessant vigour and ready resource of General French. After his escape from Ladysmith in the first days of November, that officer had returned to Cape Town and had been placed in command of a small mixed body of troops then concentrating to the south of Naauwpoort. The Boer occupation of Colesberg, which took place on November 14th and was followed by the open secession of many of the local farmers, the necessity of covering the right flank of Methuen's advance on Kimberley, of forming a connecting link between that general and the eastern column under Gatacre and confining the rebellion in the Colesberg country to the narrowest possible limits, made an effective occupation of Naauwpoort essential to the safety of Cape Colony. Moreover, in view of a possible concentration for an offensive campaign to the north of the Orange River, it was extremely important to master the Colesberg and Norval's Pont bridges and to provide for the security of the railway lines and junctions to the south. Sir Redvers Buller therefore ordered General French "to seize and hold Naauwpoort, and, whenever possible, to push on and gain possession of Colesberg."

Naauwpoort ("the narrow gate") lies just north of the western end of the Kikvorsch Hills, some seventy miles south-east of De Aar through which Methuen's troops were moving, and eighty miles west of Stormberg, the headquarters of the commandos opposing Gatacre. It was connected with the former by the railway, along which, in spite of its exposure, French in the first instance approached the scene of operations, and reinforcements and supplies were sent during the campaign. Between Naauwpoort and Stormberg, on the other side, stretched a rugged mass of mountains, the western portion of the arid wall which under various designations runs by Steynsburg, Sterkstroom, Dordrecht, Indwe, and Elliot to the frontiers of Basutoland, and roughly divides the northern plateau of Cape Colony from

the lower regions of the South. The most direct communication to the southward was by the Midland railway,[1] but at the moment when French was hurrying to Naauwpoort, this route was threatened by the enemy's patrols which had penetrated south of the mountains towards Steynsburg and Thebus, cutting the telegraph wires and breaking up the line. Some thirty miles north of Naauwpoort lay Colesberg, the road bridge fifteen miles to northward of that town, the railway bridge twenty-five to the eastward. Around the town were laagered the mixed burgher and rebel forces, between two and three thousand strong, with which the English general had to deal.

Once again, had the enemy acted with reasonable promptness and vigour, they might have seized Naauwpoort and its pass before the British could arrive. That place as well as Stormberg had been abandoned on the 9th and 10th of November by order of Buller, who feared that he was occupying more territory than the smallness of his numbers rendered advisable. In the face of a more capable enemy he would have been fully justified in retiring; in front of the Boers, as we afterwards came to know them, the movement was needless, and had a bad effect on the local population. Such was the supineness of their leaders or the backwardness of their men or supplies that, on the 19th, Naauwpoort was peaceably reoccupied by half battalions of the Black Watch and Berkshires, seventy-five New South Wales Lancers, two 9-lb. muzzle-loaders, twenty-five Cape Police, and a few of Rimington's Guides, the whole under the command of Major MacCracken. The movement had been ordered by Major-General Wauchope, who came over from De Aar to superintend it. Major-General French himself passed through De Aar on his way to the front, and all that he heard there confirmed him in the view that Methuen's communications with De Aar and the country south of the Orange River could best be defended by vigorous operations from Naauwpoort. He reached that place on the 20th, and at once issued orders for the concentration of thirty days' supplies for 3,000 men, 600 horses, and 500 mules.

Though his force was small and General Buller's orders had

[1] So disturbed were the districts in the neighbourhood of the line that General Buller removed most of the rolling stock.

From Photograph by] [*C. Knight, Aldershot.*

GENERAL FRENCH.

enjoined caution, French was not the man to take shelter behind his instructions. The essence of his scheme was offence, and from the first his attitude was aggressive. Having provided for the safety of his water supply, his camps, and the adjacent railway lines, he issued directions on the very evening of his arrival for a reconnaissance towards Colesberg.

Next morning he advanced beyond Tweeddale Station with an armoured train, containing thirty infantry and a troop of New South Wales Lancers, preceded by a patrol of twenty-five more Lancers under Captain Cox. The furthest point attained by the advanced scouts was nine miles from Colesberg, and the whole retired without seeing the enemy. The result of the reconnaissance seemed to justify an immediate advance to a position north of Arundel Station, and French, who had been reinforced by two and a half companies of Mounted Infantry from De Aar,[1] actually gave orders for its occupation with two companies of infantry on the following day, but during the morning of the 22nd he changed his mind and contented himself with the repair of a broken culvert which had checked the armoured train north of Tweeddale Station on the preceding day. The presence of the enemy at Arundel on the 23rd fully justified the alteration of plan, which, had it been carried out as at first intended, might have seriously endangered the small force entrusted with its execution.

At dawn, leaving most of the available infantry at Naauwpoort, he again reconnoitred towards Arundel with an armoured train containing a company of the Black Watch, thirty mounted infantrymen of the Worcestershires, ten Mounted Police, and a troop of New South Wales Lancers. Preceded by scouts the whole moved slowly forward until near Arundel, when the advanced guard came in touch with 100 Boers to the north of the station, and it was reported that a stronger force with two guns were advancing. The train halted, and the troops extended to the right of the line; but the enemy only fired a few ineffective shells, and the reconnaissance withdrew unmolested except by one or two feeble attempts to cut off the train which were

[1] These seem to have been the companies to which he referred in his evidence (17,171) as at first unable to ride.

easily frustrated by the cavalry. The entire loss amounted to three wounded. On the 25th the operation was repeated with the same result, except that on this occasion there were no casualties. On the 28th a portion of the 12th Lancers, with some mounted infantry and the New South Wales Lancers, reconnoitred to within two miles of Arundel, which was reported strongly held. By these three expeditions the advanced Boer positions round Arundel were located, and their strength in some degree ascertained. Despite their numbers, which were being constantly swelled by the arrival of rebel farmers, they maintained a defensive attitude; and the British commander, while awaiting the arrival of his reinforcements, found time to provide for the safety of the country in his rear. On November 29th he reconnoitred right up to the Arundel kopjes, which were found unoccupied,[1] and south-east towards Middleburg and Rosmead, the last a fortunate precaution, for on December 1st his mounted infantry prevented an attack on the junction and line, and platelayers, accompanied by cavalry, were sent forward to repair the rails west to Steynsburg. Next day a small party of Boers entered Steynsburg, blew up the important bridge at Thebus, and cut the wires. The latter were repaired on the 4th, and on the 5th French and his whole available force, with complete transport, marched to Tweeddale; but whether this was intended merely as a demonstration to impose on the enemy round Colesberg, or as a commencement of offensive operations in that direction, and was checked by the receipt of fresh information from the southward, is not clear. Whatever the reason the troops returned to Naauwpoort on the same day, and on the 6th a reconnaissance was pushed towards Thebus.

The defence organisation of the districts south of the mountains was now taking definite shape. Rosmead had been occupied, Cradock was also strongly held, and the important points on the Port Elizabeth line were guarded by 1,250 men of the Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, and Grahamstown Volunteers. Throughout the Colony various local corps were embodied, and recruiting went

[1] These were seized by the British, but the withdrawal of the 12th Lancers to assist Methuen so weakened French's force that they were subsequently abandoned.

briskly forward. In the revolted districts the Boers were no less active. During the first days of December the pressure along the British front steadily increased. Gatacre estimated the commandos at Dordrecht, Jamestown, Stormberg, Waterfall, and Molteno at some 4,000 strong; opposite French there were probably 3,000 men in arms, while 2,500 men under Grobelaar were gathering to reinforce them from Burghersdorp. The same reason for striking quickly which appealed so strongly to Gatacre must have occurred with equal force to French, and having provided for the safety of his communications, he turned, like his colleague, against the enemy in his front. Since the first reconnaissances the composition of his force had considerably changed. The Highland Brigade and the 12th Lancers were now moving to the Modder. They had been replaced by the 6th Dragoon Guards (Carbineers) under Colonel Porter, two companies of New Zealand Mounted Rifles, O and R batteries Royal Horse Artillery, two 15-pounders, and the 1st Suffolk Regiment. On December 8th two squadrons of Inniskillings (6th Dragoons) entrained for the north, and the next day were followed by 400 men of the 10th Hussars.

But before these last reinforcements arrived, French had moved. At daybreak on the 7th the New Zealanders and the Mounted Infantry left Naauwpoort and occupied a ridge to the south of Arundel, thus covering the arrival of three trains of mounted troops. Whether the enemy were surprised or had intended to withdraw is not certain. In any case the resistance offered to the British advance was of the slightest. Only 100 Boers were in Arundel when our advanced guard appeared, and they fled precipitately, leaving the hills above the siding in our hands. The place was occupied at 6 p.m., the enemy's outposts falling back three miles beyond the station on the northern curve of the hill circle that encloses Arundel. Next morning the advance was resumed. Four companies of Mounted Infantry, including the New Zealanders and Australians, under Colonel Tudway, marched against the centre of the enemy's position, while a squadron of Carbineers moved on either flank. At 6 a.m. General French arrived and the operation was pushed vigorously, the Boers retiring across the wide flats between the Rensburg range of kopjes and that north of Arundel. So good

was the progress that two hours later the right out-flanking squadron of Carbineers was close to Taaiboschlaagte. Here, however, the advance was stayed, for the Boers, estimated at 3,000 strong with several guns, opened a sharp fire and appeared ready to dispute the hills east and west of the railway. As it was not General French's intention to engage himself seriously, the force fell back upon Arundel, whose rugged kopjes, offering a fair supply of water, formed an excellent base for further operations. French had no guns to reply to those of the enemy,[1] but neither on this day nor on the 9th did the latter show any enterprise. They remained stolidly on the defensive, and so lost their last opportunity of dealing with the British at a disadvantage. The arrival of the Horse Artillery, the Inniskillings and the 10th Hussars on the following days enabled French definitely to assume the offensive, and to begin the system of harassing tactics which he continued for over six weeks with all but complete success.

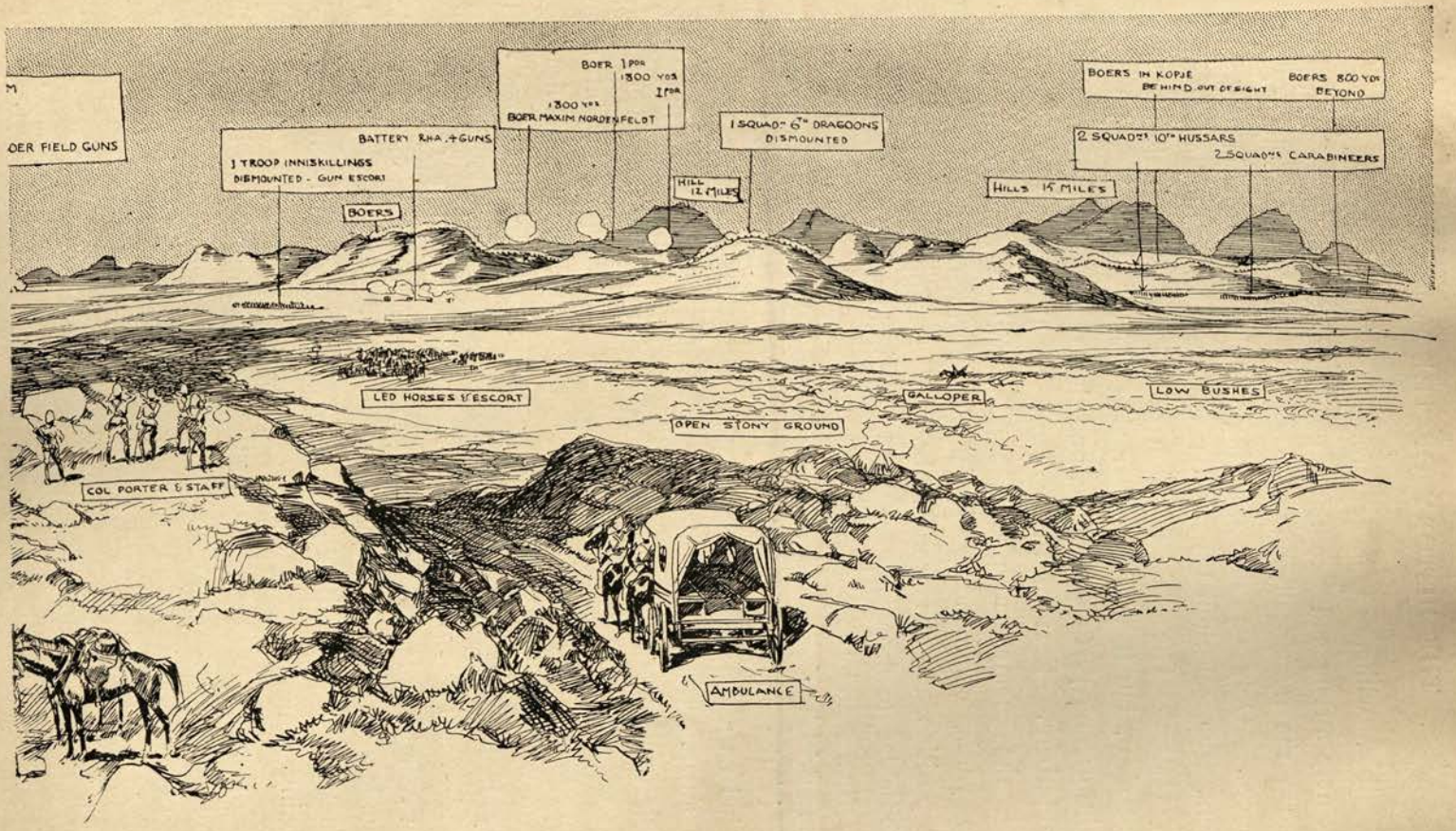
On Monday, December 11th, he commenced probing the right of the enemy's position, which consisted of a mass of rough kopjes to the west of the railway line. Conspicuous amongst them was Vaal Kop, a round conical hill, which covered the Boer right, and from its detached position seemed to offer a favourable *point d'appui* for a flank attack. At its western end lay the farm of Kuilfontein. Against this point French pushed his reconnaissance. He had with him a section of R Battery, a squadron of Carbineers, and some Mounted Infantry under Major Garnett. Major Dauncey, of the Inniskillings, patrolling towards Vaal Kop with six men, suddenly came under a heavy fire at close range, and was chased some distance until brought off by the New South Wales Lancers. Garnett, following in his footsteps found the kopje evacuated, but the patrols reported that Vaal Kop and the farm were occupied. The artillery were accordingly brought into action against the house at 2,200 yards range, killed one Boer, wounded several others, and drove the rest out. The latter retreated to Vaal Kop, which was shelled, but the Carbineers, in endeavouring to intercept the fliers, were brought up by a heavy fire

[1] The Horse batteries had joined him, but do not seem to have accompanied him on this occasion.

and had in their turn to retire. The force was in the act of returning to camp when they were met by General French, who ordered the guns to shell the reverse slope of Vaal Kop where the laager was supposed to be. This was done with good results, for the laager was found afterwards to have been destroyed by the fire and Vaal Kop evacuated.

December 13th was marked by an apparent change in the enemy's tactics. At about 4 a.m. three detachments of the enemy, numbering 1,800 men with two guns, were reported to be leaving the left of their position and moving southwards in the direction of Naauwpoort. Colonel Porter immediately moved eastward, beyond the British right, with the 6th Dragoon Guards, the 6th Dragoons, the 10th Hussars, and four guns of R Battery. The enemy's artillery were promptly silenced, only firing three shots, and the cavalry, by outflanking movements, drove the enemy back into their Taaiboschlaagte position. Vaal Kop, which appears to have been occupied overnight, was held throughout the day by one squadron of the 10th Hussars and two guns, thus retaining a considerable force of the enemy on the Platberg. In the afternoon the Boers occupied Kuilfontein farm, but were driven out by the guns on the kop with the loss of forty killed and wounded. This day's fighting put an end for some time to their offensive projects, and by its moral effect did something to counter-balance the effects of Stormberg and Magersfontein. Our own loss amounted to one officer of the Inniskillings wounded, one man killed, four wounded, and one missing in the Carbineers, and two men wounded in the 10th Hussars.

During the following fortnight the same tactics were steadily pursued. No immediate or decisive result accrued from any one of these encounters, but their moral effect was cumulative. The artillery of the enemy was unable to cope with the British guns, their convoys approaching from Colesberg were often under fire, while their dread of the lance, their weak discipline and want of initiative prevented their attempting an effective counter-stroke. Fighting was constantly in progress round the horns of their position, at Kuilfontein, towards the Platberg, and along the Taaiboschlaagte front, and although it was



ENGAGEMENT OF DECEMBER 13TH.

impossible, without a larger force, to drive Schoeman out of his extremely strong and extensive positions, it proved comparatively easy to keep the numerically superior enemy within the limits of their own defences. Only on the outlying kopjes was trouble caused by the snipers, who constituted here, as everywhere, a marked feature of the Boer tactics. The exact position of the outpost line during this period is not clear, but it would appear that Vaal Kop remained in our hands for the greater part of the time, and that our patrols pressed in close upon the Platberg. East of the railway, on the kopjes above Taaiboschlaagte, the enemy had placed a gun, with a range of from 5,000 to 7,000 yards, commanding Jasfontein Farm on the left rear of the Boer position and the ground above Vaal Kop towards the west. The Taaiboschlaagte kopjes were held, according to the reports, by some 2,000 Boers, and the shape of this long ridge running out to the east of the British right above Arundel together with the guns upon it made it the most formidable part of the hostile position, whether regarded as a defence, or as a point of support for a counter movement on Naauwpoort. With a view to harassing this part of the Boer lines and discovering the strength and dispositions of the enemy, French conducted a reconnaissance round their flank upon Jasfontein on the morning of December 18th. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles occupied the farm without resistance, but in a few minutes found themselves under a very heavy rifle and artillery fire from the neighbouring kopjes and those above Taaiboschlaagte. French, who had left O Battery some way in rear in order to avoid the shell fire, now summoned it to his aid, and, under cover of the guns, the Colonials withdrew with admirable steadiness. As usual the shooting of the enemy had been bad, two men only being wounded.

After this skirmish until near the end of the month little worthy of mention took place. Cavalry patrols[1] were constantly out probing the flanks of the Boers, who gave increasing signs of nervousness and unrest. On December 27th the enemy began to yield to the continual

[1] The mounted troops were at this time divided into two brigades. 1st, under Porter: Carbineers, New South Wales Lancers, New Zealand Mounted Rifles, and one company Mounted Infantry, to east of railway; 2nd, under Fisher: 6th Dragoons, 10th Hussars, and one company Mounted Infantry, to west of railway.

WATER CART.

pressure on his flanks and rear, and on the 29th unexpectedly evacuated his position, and fell back on Colesberg, where, according to rumour, he had for some time maintained a special force of 600 men ready to move at a moment's notice to any threatened point. So ended the first stage of French's operations. The condition of his horses, at first weakened by constant work, change of climate, sickness, and want of water had improved; and his position generally was far stronger than when he left Naauwpoort. He had now a well-established patrol connection with Hanover Road and Rosmead, his communications were fairly safe, and every week brought reinforcements nearer. Better than all, he had inspired the enemy with a dread of his tactics. The high-water mark of Boer success in Cape Colony was reached in the middle of December; by the end of the year the ebb had begun.[1]

[1] On Dec. 26th General French was reinforced by the 1st Essex Regiment

CHAPTER VIII

FRENCH'S OPERATIONS ROUND COLESBERG

(JANUARY, 1900.)

SCHOEMAN'S POSITION AT COLESBERG—FRENCH ADVANCES TO RENSBURG—SCHEME OF ATTACK AGAINST THE WESTERN FRONT—JANUARY 1ST, MACCRACKEN STORMS BERKSHIRE HILL—ACTION OF THE CAVALRY—ARTILLERY DUEL—FISHER FAILS TO GAIN THE BOER REAR—RESULTS OF THE DAY'S FIGHTING—JANUARY 2ND, LOSS OF A TRAIN OF SUPPLIES—JANUARY 4TH, ATTACK ON BRITISH LEFT—DRIVEN OFF WITH LOSS—DISASTER TO THE SUFFOLKS ON JANUARY 6TH—FRENCH'S VIEW—PROBABLE CAUSES OF THE RETREAT OF THE INFANTRY—OPERATIONS TO THE EAST OF COLESBERG—RECONNAISSANCES OF JANUARY 7TH—SLINGER'S FARM OCCUPIED—FURTHER RECONNAISSANCE OF JANUARY 11TH—ATTACK ON SLINGER'S HILL ON JANUARY 15TH—THE GUNS ON COLES KOP—JANUARY 14TH, MAJOR ALLENBY'S RECONNAISSANCE TO COLESBERG ROAD BRIDGE—THE REBEL FARMERS—LOSS OF A PATROL, JANUARY 16TH—JANUARY 18TH, ARRIVAL OF CLEMENTS WITH REINFORCEMENTS—GREATEST DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH'S LINES—ADVANTAGE TAKEN OF THE WEAKNESSES OF HIS OPPONENTS—JANUARY 25TH, RECONNAISSANCE TO RIETFONTEIN PLESSIS—END OF FRENCH'S CAMPAIGN AT COLESBERG—VALUE OF HIS OPERATIONS

THE position now occupied by Schoeman's commando was well adapted to defence. The town of Colesberg, which lies some two miles west of the railway junction, was situated in a hollow encircled by a mass of high, steep kopjes, which were placed so as to flank one another. The place was therefore a natural fortress of great strength. As it was within one Boer march of the Orange River bridges and drifts, it was easy for Schoeman, should he find it necessary, to place the formidable obstacle of the river between himself and the British in a single night. The country, moreover, offered admirable positions for rear-guard actions, notably about Rietfontein Plessis, on the Colesberg Bridge Road, and to the eastward along the Oorlog's Poort River. The extensive front held by the enemy covered both lines of retreat and could only be turned by wide

outflanking movements to the north or east.[1] Regarded, therefore, from a purely military point of view, Schoeman's retirement from the Taaiboschlaagte position on the night of December 29th was sound policy, and the British Commander, following next day on the enemy's traces, found himself confronted by a difficult task.

The hills about Colesberg "form a kind of square, and at each corner there are outlying kopjes within rifle range of the main position." The chief of these was Coles Kop, a very steep hill, 800 feet above the level of the plain, some 2,000 yards from the western face of the Colesberg ridges, and a conspicuous object for many miles round. At about the same distance from the south-west corner, where the morning reconnaissance had disclosed the presence of a Boer battery, was another group of hills, and on these French established an artillery position with some cavalry and mounted infantry. This preparatory position, known as Porter's Hill, was held by us throughout the operations that followed.

Leaving a detachment[2] at Arundel, French advanced his main body to the hills abandoned by the enemy. He placed his central camp at Rensburg Station, his left at Maeder's Farm and on the Platberg, his right on the Taaiboschlaagte kopjes. This position was partly entrenched during the day, the Headquarters were brought up, and the railway as far as Rensburg Station put in working order. The line between that point and Colesberg had been partially destroyed.

On December 31st (Sunday) the British General made a close personal reconnaissance of the western face of the Colesberg position. Continuing in his hitherto successful policy of a warfare of positions, and aware that the enemy were flinching, he resolved to storm two more outlying groups of hills on the flank of the enemy's stronghold

[1] The shortest line of retreat for a Boer force at Colesberg and the road most frequented by the enemy was that leading to the Colesberg Road Bridge. The country was difficult, the Rietfontein Hills offering a good position for a rearguard covering the passage of the river. The Norval's Pont communication, which was far more important to the British on account of the railway bridge and was exposed to attack from the south, was covered by a series of still stronger positions. On whichever flank the British attack, the possession of divergent lines of retreat was of great advantage to the enemy. See Chapter XVI.

[2] One squadron 6th Dragoons, four companies Suffolks,

and pivoting on these to seize with mounted troops points to the northward which would compel the enemy to evacuate the town and the immediate neighbourhood. The plan of operations, which was to take the form of an attack at dawn (generally called a "night-attack") was as follows:—The main column, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Fisher (10th Hussars), was to assemble at Maeder's Farm, some five miles west-south-west of the point of assault, at dusk. It was to consist of ten guns Royal Horse Artillery, two squadrons of the Inniskillings, the 10th Hussars, one Mounted Infantry company, and four companies of the Berkshire Regiment. It was to move by road to Coles Kop, where the Cavalry and Artillery, forming the rear of the column, were to halt. Major F. W. N. MacCracken was then to move due east upon the chosen hill and rush it with his infantry, the Mounted Infantry supporting him closely. It was intended, so soon as the first attack had succeeded, to send the Cavalry to seize the outlying kopjes at the north-west corner, and so, by working round into the rear of the enemy's lines, to compel him to evacuate the town or to surrender. In conjunction with the main column, which French himself accompanied, Colonel Porter, with two squadrons of his own regiment, two Royal Horse Artillery guns, and one company of New Zealand Mounted Rifles, was ordered to join the remaining squadron of Carbineers, and the other company of New Zealanders on Porter's Hill under cover of night, to ascertain the state of affairs at daybreak and to co-operate. Further to the east Rimington's Scouts occupied Jasfontein Farm, six miles east of Rensburg. The success of the plan, which was an extremely bold one, depended on the rapidity and vigour of its execution; for if the Boers were not closely pressed they would be able to strike heavily at French's weakened right and centre, round and east of Rensburg.

Fisher's column reached Maeder's Farm at 9 p.m., and at 1.30 a.m. the march was continued, every detail being carried out as ordered. MacCracken, who knew the ground, completely surprised the Boer picket on the kopje and drove them eastwards on to the hills which overhung the town. From these further heights the enemy poured a very heavy fire for some minutes into the darkness

and as the capture of these kopjes was not comprehended in the plan the infantry made no attempt to gain more ground but confined themselves to the task of securing their position. No counter attack was made and daylight found them firmly ensconced on the hill they had won and were to hold for six weeks "against a constant fire of artillery and musketry which in the first few days caused them considerable loss," and made it impossible to supply them with water, food, or ammunition during the daytime.

French lost no time in prosecuting the enterprise thus happily begun. "At the first appearance of light I despatched Lieutenant-Colonel Fisher with the Cavalry to the north-west corner, with orders to seize and hold the hills there with a squadron and work round the northern face of the square. This was well done, and Colonel Fisher's patrols reached the positions on the Colesberg waggon road, the southernmost of which (known as Grassy Hill) was that which the Suffolk Regiment attacked on the night of the 5th and 6th."

In the hope of driving the enemy off the hills in front of the Berkshire Regiment, and distracting their attention from the Cavalry on the left, the British General massed the ten guns against the western face, and at dawn opened a heavy fire, raking a laager and enfilading the right of the enemy's position, while the two guns from Porter's Hill were turned upon the same point. The Boer guns, which included a British 15-pounder taken at Stormberg, and two Vickers-Maxims, and numbered seven or eight pieces in all, replied with unwonted vigour, and for a time the British gunners had some difficulty in holding their own. For two hours the duel continued, the riflemen on both sides joining in hotly. Gradually, however, skill and discipline asserted their wonted superiority. One by one the enemy's guns were silenced, their infantry fire died away, and about 9 a.m. they appeared so far shaken that the three troops of mounted men were sent forward from Porter's Hill to attack the south-west corner. But within 600 yards of the position they were met with a heavy rifle fire, and despite their endurance and gallantry, could gain no ground. A brave attempt made by a troop of New Zealanders to win a foothold failed, and the little party had to be withdrawn by Major Robin, under a hail of

COLES KOP.

bullets. So badly did the Boers shoot that they escaped without a casualty, but it was seen that the enemy was too strong to warrant a frontal attack and the force fell back on Porter's Hill.

Meanwhile the progress of the Cavalry to the northwards had come to a standstill. At one moment General French was confident that he would succeed either in surrounding Colesberg or compelling its evacuation. At 2 p.m. he heliographed from Coles Kop that he was demonstrating north of the town towards the Junction, where a strong laager of the enemy was holding a hill and a position "south-east (north-east?) of Colesberg as far as Junction. Our position cuts line of retreat *viâ* Road Bridge. Some 1,000 Boers with two guns reported retiring to Norvals." His view of the work of the Cavalry on this day is thus expressed in his despatch. "Owing to a misconception of my orders and instructions, I regret that the Cavalry on my left did not quite fulfil the task allotted to them. Throughout the day I sent constant messages to the Brigadier to push forward to the Colesberg Road and occupy the position indicated above. Had he found himself able to do this I have no hesitation in saying that we could have occupied the town on that day." It would appear from the words already quoted, which refer to that part of his orders which Colonel Fisher actually executed, that "the position indicated above" was "Grassy Hill," where the Suffolk reverse occurred five days later. This hill lies some 5,000 yards north of Colesberg in the angle formed by the Colesberg Bridge and Bastard's Nek roads, and there is no question that its occupation would have made the town untenable. At the moment when Colonel Fisher was checked, two squadrons of the 10th Hussars were actually occupying the high kopje known as Kloof Ridge outside the north-west[1] corner and within 2,700 yards of Grassy Hill and had beaten off a counter attack; they held the kloof until the following day when they were relieved by four companies of the Suffolk Regiment. It appears that, having secured this first point, Colonel Fisher took a squadron of the 6th Dragoons, one of his own regiment, and O Battery round the enemy's right flank. The guns

[1] Possibly this was the hill held by the strong laager to which French referred in his 2 p.m. heliograph.

came into action against Grassy Hill on a ridge to the northward, but with their flank escort were forced to retire by a heavy musketry fire from the left. As the position in front—some part, no doubt, of Grassy Hill—was also strongly held, the Cavalry contented themselves with observing it for the rest of the day, falling back at nightfall to the rear of Coles Kop. The problem of clearing with a few squadrons and horse-guns a long series of kopjes held by mobile riflemen was one common enough in South Africa; and failure was too frequent for its occurrence to need special remark here. That on this occasion the cavalry were unsuccessful was particularly unfortunate, for so good an opportunity of driving the enemy from Colesberg never arose again. Of the feasibility of the operation French seems to have entertained no doubt.

Meanwhile, towards Jasfontein, Schoeman was making a well-directed but ineffectual attempt to take the pressure off his own right by outflanking that of the British, which throughout these operations was our weak point. With at least 1,000 men he broke out of the town, but failed in the face of Rimington's men and a portion of the Carbineers detached by Porter to make good his attack. With his retirement ended the more active operations of the day, though the British artillery kept up a slow, regular fire upon the western face until sunset. Up to a certain point the day's operations had been very successful and singularly free from mishap or confusion. In spite of the failure of the Cavalry on the left, the two outlying groups of kopjes at which French had aimed were in our hands, an attempted counter stroke had completely failed, the enemy's artillery had been silenced, one of their lines of retreat threatened, and their freedom of action seriously circumscribed. Compared with the advantages gained, the price paid, one officer and six men killed, and twenty-one wounded, was insignificant. The enemy probably suffered considerably from our artillery fire, over fifty, it was rumoured, being killed and wounded.

Next day, although the outposts skirmished freely, and Fisher made more than one attempt to turn the Boer right, nothing of importance was effected. Watson's four companies of Suffolks replaced the squadron of 10th Hussars on the Kloof Ridge, the Cavalry taking up position

at Maeder's and near the Windmill so as to cover the left flank of the infantry; and Major-General Brabazon came out of Rensburg and took command of the troops on the west of the town. French, whose headquarters were with the 1st Cavalry Brigade at Rensburg, reported that he was strengthening his left flank and occupying posts to the south of Colesberg, that his mounted troops had free access to the plain to the north of the town, and that small reinforcements would enable him to dislodge the enemy from his position. This last request was granted on the 3rd of January, when the 20th Battery Royal Field Artillery and the composite regiment of Household Cavalry were ordered to his assistance from De Aar. The only incident of note on the 2nd was the loss of a train carrying 22,000 rations. Thirty-one trucks, which were standing at Rensburg Station, escaped down the Colesberg incline, and were finally wrecked at a broken culvert beyond Plewman's. Another train, carrying E Company of the Suffolk Regiment and some New South Wales Lancers, went out to rescue the stores, but the enemy at Vanderwaltsfontein opened fire on the infantry when they alighted and forced them to seek shelter. Though they afterwards returned under cover of darkness, no appreciable part of the supplies could be regained, and the train was burnt.

On January 4th, aware of the serious nature of his situation, Schoeman made a determined attempt on French's left, at the point where a further British success was most to be feared. Under cover of night Piet de Wet succeeded in escaping the notice of the Cavalry and established himself with 1,000 men on "some hills running about east and west at right angles to the left rear of our position," on a line about three miles to the north and north-east of Colesberg.

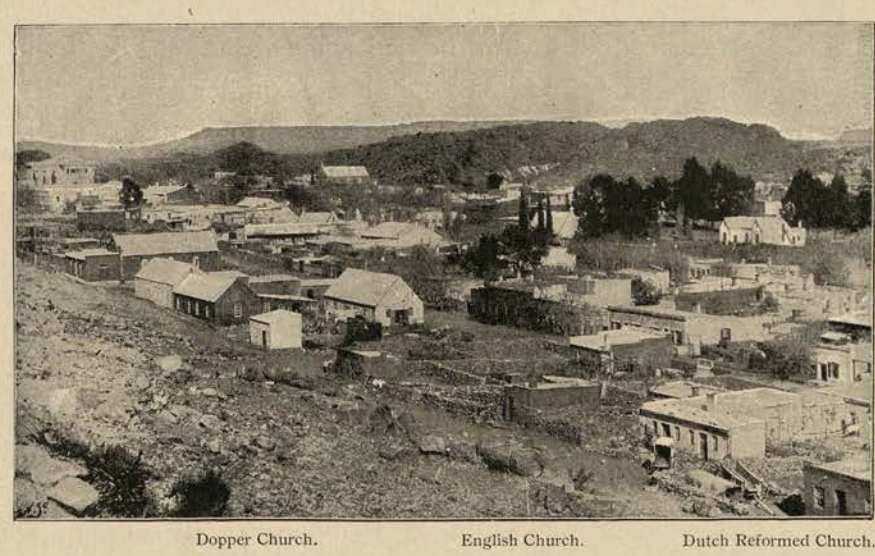
At daybreak some Inniskillings, who were furnishing one of the northernmost pickets, were suddenly fired on and had to retire, and a large number of the enemy advanced to a range of kopjes 2,000 yards to the north of Kloof Camp, whence they opened fire upon the British posts. About 5 a.m. the gun fire on both sides became heavy, two sections of R Battery on Artillery Nek replying to the enemy, who sharply engaged the troops on Kloof Ridge and on the spur where the cavalry had been surprised. Two companies of the Berkshires moved

up in support of the Suffolks, and General Brabazon, who had reached Artillery Nek soon after the fight commenced, ordered up the 10th Hussars from Maeder's Farm. On their arrival they were directed by General French to turn the enemy's right and get in rear of the kopjes he was occupying. This movement proved the turning point of the day. The greater part of the Boers fled when they saw the cavalry descending upon their flank. Some galloped across the plain towards their guns at Plessis Poort and Bastard's Nek; the Hussars and Inniskillings dashed after them, and some of the latter under Captain Herbert succeeded in inflicting punishment with their lances. The Hussars, checked by a heavy fire from a small rocky eminence, dismounted and cleared it with their carbines, but in so doing lost both their majors, Harvey killed and Alexander wounded. The enemy retreated westwards under the rifles of the Suffolks and the fire of four horse guns near Artillery Nek. The Hussars now pressed onwards along the rear of the hostile position and reached a low kopje west of Grassy Hill, but struck with fire from the eastward and impeded by wire they were obliged to retire and regain a ridge south-west of the enemy's original line of kopjes, amongst which a remnant still maintained the fight. A section of O Battery now came up in support of the Hussars, and raked the crest with shrapnel; but the Boers, whose line of retreat was now commanded by our fire, refused to run the gauntlet, and clung stubbornly to their rocks. General French therefore decided to clear them out by direct attack. Under cover of the artillery, Captain De Lisle with 150 Mounted Infantry gained the right flank of the Boer position, and by a skilful use of the ground dislodged the enemy without loss and captured twenty-one prisoners. The rest of the enemy flying westwards came under the British rifle fire. With this success, which took place at 1 p.m., the fight ended. Schoeman's attack had completely failed. With the loss of upwards of ninety killed and wounded,[1] he withdrew northwards and next day occupied a position in the neighbourhood of Plessis Poort with two heavy guns. His numbers, however, still allowed him to hold Colesberg, and the hills to the south-east which

[1] French's despatch.

covered his line of retreat by Achtertang to Norval's Pont. Our own losses on this day amounted to six killed and fifteen wounded. Lieutenant Gibson was dangerously wounded in the charge of the Inniskillings, being hit in four places.

Having inflicted this severe repulse the British commander determined on a decisive stroke. A series of reconnaissances, in the last of which Sir John Milbanke, his aide-de-camp, won the Victoria Cross by rescuing a hussar when himself severely wounded, had proved beyond doubt that Grassy Hill was the key to Colesberg; and General French, whose infantry had now been strengthened by the



COLESBERG: IN CAPE COLONY, TAKEN BY THE FREE STATERS.

arrival of the 1st Essex and 1st Yorkshire Regiments,[1] and the 4th Field Battery, resolved to capture it.

His preparations were much more extensive than the event would suggest. Colonel Watson, commanding the half battalion of Suffolks on Kloof Ridge, with whom French had frequently discussed the possibility of taking the hill, was confident that when his other four companies had arrived he would be strong enough to attempt the operation. On the 4th his battalion was completed; and the other reinforcements having also come up, two companies of Berkshires were

[1] Belonging to the 18th Brigade.

detailed to act as a reserve to the attacking column. The 4th Field Battery was to keep down the fire from Gibraltar and Anti-MacCracken. The Inniskillings were to hold the hill taken by De Lisle, and so cover the northern flank, while detachments of the same regiment were to reconnoitre towards Bastard's Nek and Plessis Poort, where a laager and a gun had been located. The 10th Hussars, eight horse artillery guns, and 100 Mounted Infantry were to concentrate in a valley half a mile north-west of Kloof Camp. By these measures General French hoped to occupy the Boers north and south of the point of attack, and prevent them from reinforcing Grassy Hill or falling on the flanks of the stormers. The hill itself was believed to be unoccupied.[1]

With Colonel Watson, to whose battalion the task of assault had been committed, lay the choice of the proper moment for the attempt. Late in the evening of January 5th he sent a message informing French that he had again reconnoitred Grassy Hill, and that he felt confident he could take it with four companies of his regiment. He was granted permission to rush it if he saw a favourable chance, on condition that he should acquaint the General and all the troops in his neighbourhood of his intention.

"Colonel Watson made complete and adequate preparations to ensure success."[2] Not until the moment of starting had his regiment any idea of his design. Half the battalion was left on picquet duty under Major Cubitt, who received instructions to warn all immediately concerned, including the artillery, of what was passing, and at a given signal to send forward ammunition and the water-carts. The two Berkshire companies were ordered to fall in at 5 a.m., and at half an hour after midnight, with his remaining four companies, Colonel Watson left camp. The distance to be covered was two miles,[3] and the night was intensely dark and still.

Soon after starting Colonel Watson halted the column and explained his intentions to the officers, assigning to each company

[1] Goldmann, "With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa," p. 53.

[2] French's dispatch.

[3] Or 2,700 yards from the left picquet of the Suffolks.

the point he wished it to attack, but adding that they were not to do so till specially ordered. Scouts, it would appear, were pushed out, but failed to discover the enemy. The companies extended and continued to advance, the roughness of the ground and the obscurity causing some little confusion as they slowly ascended the hill. About two-thirds of the way up another halt was made, and Colonel Watson, accompanied by Captain Brown and Lieutenant Wilkins, the adjutant, went on to reconnoitre. On their return the order to advance was given, and the leading company, H, had got within one hundred yards of the summit when a heavy fire was opened on it from a rough breastwork of boulders on the crest. With a cheer the company charged at the rifle flashes, and had traversed about half the distance that separated them from the enemy when the deadliness of the fire forced them to lie down. Meanwhile Colonel Watson had ordered the other three companies to retire. At the bottom of the hill a halt took place, after which he directed a second company up to the support of the first, but for some unknown reason, probably because he thought it was taking the wrong direction, he ordered it to halt and wait. By this time the forward impulse, which alone can give success to a night attack, had been lost. Many of the men in the rear companies had mistaken the Colonel's first order to mean a general retirement, and were now straggling back towards the British lines bewildered by the darkness and the absence of their officers. The latter able only to see and control those men near them, could not recall their men or reorganise their companies. Their commander saw his plan frustrated, and dawn coming on apace. H company was lying exposed to the enemy's fire with its captain wounded; the adjutant had fallen at the first volley. Captain Brett, with part of the second company, had also charged, and was now lying to the right of H unable to advance; the rest of the men who had not retired were a little further behind. In the vain hope of saving the situation these men, headed by the remaining officers, made a final rush, which broke under the enemy's fire, and soon afterwards, in broad daylight, Colonel Watson himself was shot dead. From this moment advance or retreat were alike impossible. Nailed to the ground by a deadly cross fire, the survivors

fought on until the Boers, creeping round the flanks, had practically surrounded them. Still, however, Captain Brett and a few of his men who had got cover amongst the boulders held out, and at his bidding Sergeant Britton and five others made an attempt to fight their way to the nearest signal station and direct the fire of the artillery. Three of the party, all of them wounded, escaped and fulfilled their mission. But no aid was forthcoming; and an hour and a half after dawn Brett, who had early been wounded in the chest, with the rest of those on the hill surrendered. The remainder of the column had by this time returned to camp. Major Graham, with a bullet in the shoulder and a sprained ankle, was one of the few officers who escaped.

The first news of the disaster had reached camp at 3.30 a.m. in the shape of some wounded men, who stated that the attack had failed. Major Cubitt, who, on hearing the firing, had reinforced the left of his picquet line with a company of the Berkshire Regiment, immediately informed the artillery; and as soon as there was light enough to see, the two guns in rear of the camp opened fire. Soon after General French, who was on Coles Kop before dawn, learnt what had happened, but long before any reinforcements could be sent the fight was over. Of the men on the hill four officers and twenty-eight men were killed, six officers and fifty men wounded, and seventy-seven men made prisoners.

As is usual in such cases, reports were current that the enemy had been warned, and were prepared to receive our attack. These statements appear to be baseless. Probably the hill would have been found unoccupied had not General Delarey, who had arrived late on the afternoon of the 5th, noticed its tactical importance, and occupied it with 100 Zarps.[1] The failure was due to other causes. Grassy Hill once more emphasised the inherently hazardous nature of a night attack. General French ascribed the disaster to panic, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that something of the kind occurred.[2] But it is hardly fair to leave the word unqualified. The gist of the matter seems to lie in this, that darkness increases the likelihood of

[1] Goldmann, p. 54.

[2] However, before the courts-martial held on the surrender, no evidence appears to have been given showing the circumstances of this panic. Royal Commission, Appendix vol. p. 413.

misunderstanding or disorder a hundredfold, and practically makes recovery impossible. The amount of loss inflicted is comparatively unimportant. Good infantry will endure heavier losses than those of the Suffolks without flinching so long as they can see what they are doing and feel they are controlled by their officers. The three companies which retired at the order of their colonel had scarcely been under fire. But scattered over a large extent of broken ground, and deprived of those to whom they were accustomed to look for guidance, they lost their cohesion, and, ignorant of the locality and half believing that a retirement was intended, struggled helplessly back to camp. Probably any order to retire under the conditions that obtain in a night attack is a mistake. It would seem that their gallant and capable leader intended, while he held the enemy in front with one company, to move out the others to attack their flanks. But it is a question whether an attempt to manœuvre at all in such circumstances is advisable, and it would appear safer to risk the heaviest losses by frontal attack than lose the *élan* which is the first essential of success. Every moment that victory is delayed increases the chances of defeat.

The repulse gave fresh heart to the Boers and inflicted a material check upon French's operations. With a third of its officers and nearly a fourth of its men lost, the battalion was no longer able to remain at the front, it was withdrawn to Naauwpoort and its place was taken by the 1st Essex; and French, observing that the Boers were strengthening their right, now sought to press his attack in another quarter.

For some days he had intended to commence operations against the enemy's left, but was prevented by the exhaustion of men and horses. On the day after the Suffolk repulse, however, he left Rensburg in the early morning with the Royal Horse Guards Squadron—the Household Cavalry having just arrived—with the object of finding a good, well-watered position, ten miles to the north-east. A long, broken ridge running southwards from the "high hills" lying in the railway angle at the Junction offered a solid pivot round which to strike towards Achtertang and the Norval's Pont railway; but possessing no water supply, it could not be held, and French pushed two miles further east to the farm of Slingersfontein before he found

what he required. Under the fire which the Boers now opened with guns and rifles, the squadron retired, Captain Ricardo and four troopers being taken prisoners. The object of the reconnaissance, however, had been effected, and on the 9th, after allowing the horses a further rest, General French, under cover of a general bombardment of the enemy's front, returned and permanently occupied Slingersfontein. Colonel Porter was left in command, having under him the Household Cavalry, the 6th Dragoon Guards, the New South Wales Lancers, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, and four guns of O Battery, with the order to reconnoitre well to the north and east. To this extension of the British right the enemy, who had been reinforced, replied by occupying the northern end of Slinger's Ridge and a hill covering the railway towards Achtertang, but Porter's troops prevented them penetrating further to the south. Next day (11th) French and the whole of the Slingersfontein force moved out at 5 a.m. with the object of "thoroughly reconnoitring the enemy's disposition and strength," and Major Hunter-Weston (Royal Engineers), with a detachment of cavalry, was ordered to pass round the British right, and if possible reach the railway and destroy the telegraph wire. The main column advanced north-westward, brought its guns into action against a laager, and prepared to turn the Boer left with the Household Cavalry, whilst the Carbineers and New Zealanders held them fast in front. Ground was already gained when the enemy were very strongly reinforced[1] from Norval's Pont, and French ordered a retirement. Hunter-Weston failed to reach the railway, which ran through very difficult country, and was strongly guarded throughout. For several days no further movement took place on this flank, a state of affairs far more creditable to General French's insight into the character of his opponents than to their soldiership. According to reports, they had fully 5,000 men in and around Colesberg,[2] and a strong effort against

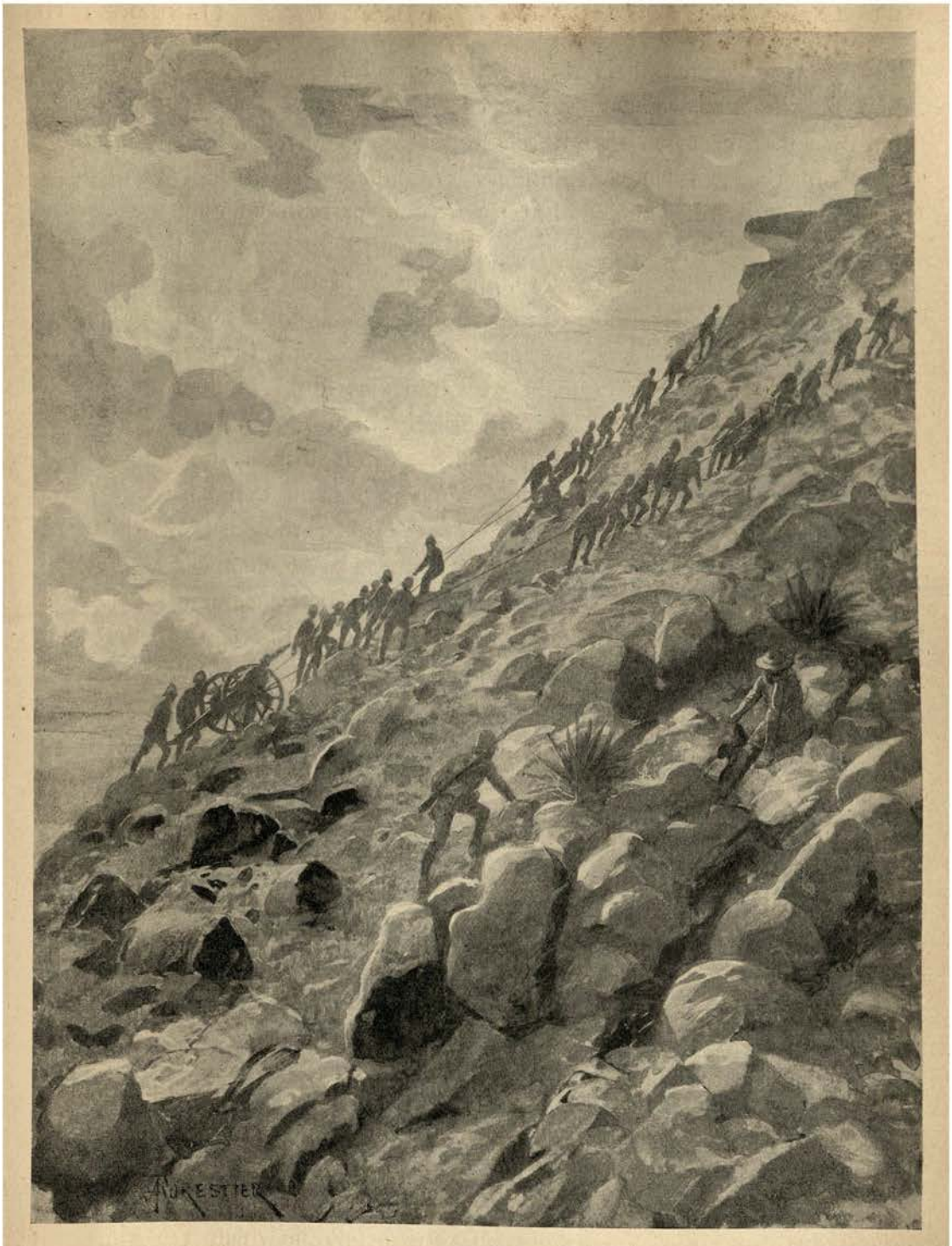
[1] These reinforcements were said to have come from Kimberley and Ladysmith. It was also rumoured at Sterkstroom that one of the Grobelaars had moved from Stormberg with 1,000 men to Schoeman's support. Commandant Runck estimates the total force at Colesberg at 5,200 men.

[2] About this time intelligence was received from Natal that the Boers were contemplating a vigorous offensive on the Orange River.

the exposed British flank at Slingersfontein was dictated by every military and political consideration. If, as General French says, their own defensive line was of enormous length, the half circle of investment which had been drawn round them was still longer and manned by a numerically weaker force. The one attack that they risked against the Slingersfontein position, in itself well conceived and vigorously driven home, was repulsed by two companies of dismounted men, and never repeated.

On the 13th the British Camp at Slinger's had been shelled during a dust storm, but the artillery had easily silenced the enemy. On the morning of the 15th, however, a more determined effort was directed against the advanced post, half a mile north-west of the Farm, a high and rather steep hill surrounded by a good deal of "dead" ground, and sloping in a series of small kopjes to the plain beneath the main Boer position. It was held by one Company of the Yorkshire Regiment and one of the New Zealand Rifles, the whole under the command of Captain Orr. Three hundred Boers established themselves, under cover of night, on the kopjes in front of the post, and opened a heavy, long-range fire at dawn. At about 10 a.m. a feint was made against the eastern face, held by the New Zealanders, and while the attention of the troops was mainly turned to this point a larger[1] body of the enemy reached the foot of the north-western slope and commenced creeping upwards under cover of rocks and boulders. Meanwhile the more distant detachments kept up a heavy fire on the Yorkshiremen, who held this part of the position, forcing them to remain under the shelter of a stone wall, and preventing them from seeing what was happening in their immediate front. The tactics of Majuba, Spion Kop, and Cæsar's Camp were repeated. Before any one was aware of their presence, the leading Boers dashed over the crest and getting to within a few yards of the wall, shot down Orr and killed his sergeant-major. The moment was critical. The Yorkshiremen deprived of their leader, and startled by the sudden appearance of the enemy, had been driven out of their two sangars when Captain Madocks, who was in command of the New Zealanders on the right, ran up with a few of his own men, rallied the Yorkshiremen

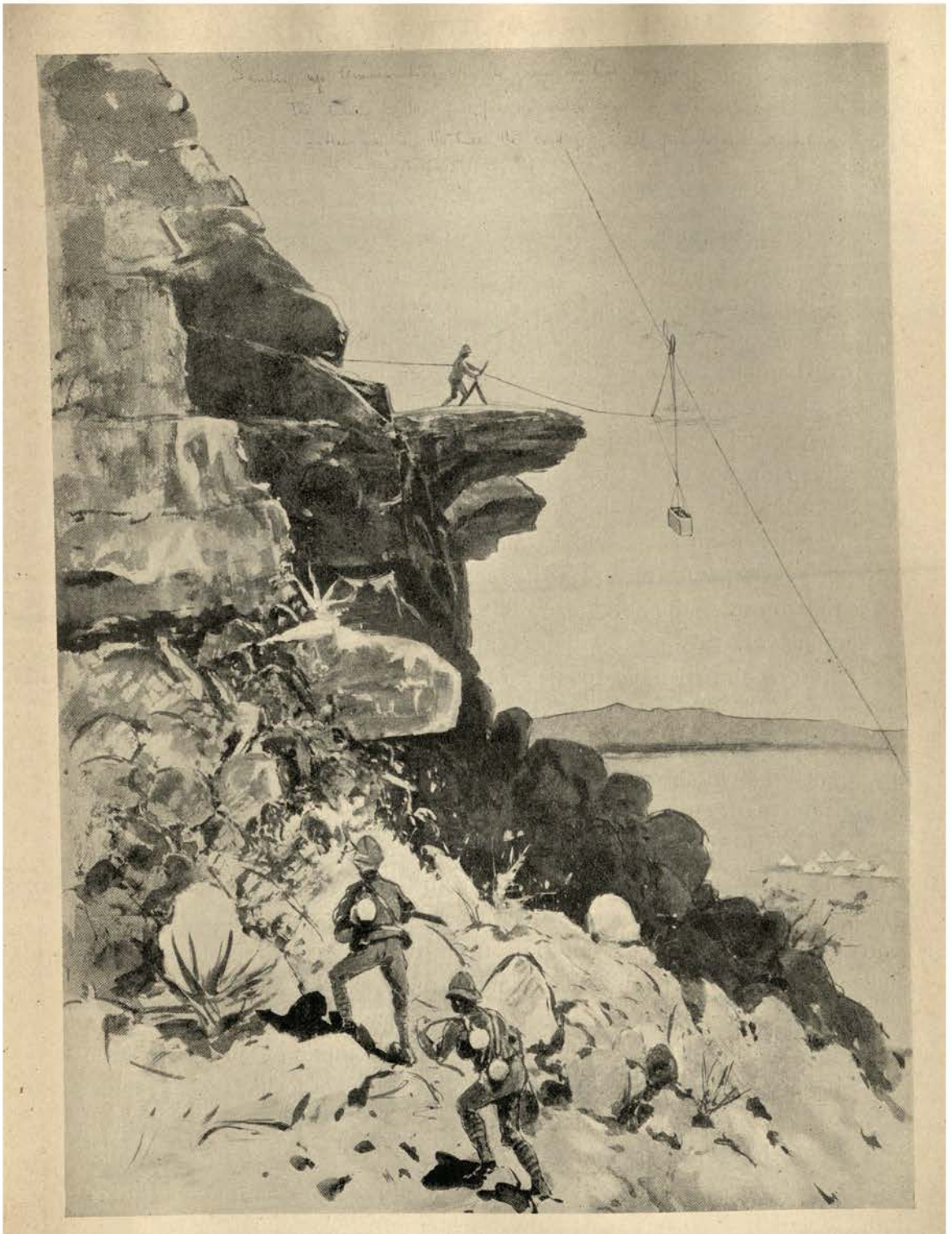
[1] According to the *Times*' account "about 100 guided by natives."



HAULING GUNS UP COLES KOP.

and then called on them to fix bayonets and charge. Led on by him the infantry retook the first sangar, but it was not till some of his own men came up that he cleared the second. As he sprang over the wall the two New Zealanders on either side of him were shot dead in the act of jumping, but the remainder followed and the enemy gave way. A Boer officer, dressed in a long frock coat, turned to meet Madocks, and both fired simultaneously. Madocks was untouched, his opponent fell dead; and the Yorkshiremen pressing hard upon the flying Dutch, bayoneted several before they reached the bottom of the hill. The main attack disposed of, Madocks returned to the top of the hill and with the help of four guns of O Battery, which had been sent to the front by Porter, turned the enemy out of the western slopes and the small kopjes at the base. To his prompt action was due the safety of the post, the loss of which, in Colonel Porter's opinion, would probably have compelled him to abandon the Slinger's position. The British had six men killed, and five wounded; the Boers left twenty-one dead at the foot of the hill, so that the total of their casualties must have exceeded fifty.

Although French's principal efforts in the week that followed the Suffolk reverse had been made to the east of Colesberg, the troops on the west had not ceased to harass the enemy and to strengthen their own positions. With immense labour Major Butcher (4th Royal Field Artillery) had by the 16th placed two of his 15-pounders on Coles Kop, from the airy top of which the guns obtained a range of nearly 9,000 yards over the surrounding country and could search any part of the enemy's positions on the west, south-east, or north of the town. The ammunition was taken up the nearly perpendicular face by means of a hoist running on a wire rope constructed by the Engineers. So harassing did the fire of these guns become that the Boers removed all their tents and laagers from the open ground and took shelter in the rocky valleys. Deserters reported that the kopjes on the western face were only strongly held at night, in readiness for a sudden attack, but that at dawn large numbers of the burghers went into the town to sleep. The houses themselves, which were known to contain 300 British subjects, were not bombarded. Either the



AMMUNITION HOIST ON COLES KOP.

British commander refrained on that account, or, what is more probable, he opined that the mere wrecking of houses would have no decisive effect upon the operations. All that could be achieved in this direction had been done by the shelling of the Boer laagers and the kopjes held by their outposts. Between the opposing lines rifle fire was occasionally interchanged: indeed, in the case of the Berkshire Regiment it rarely ceased, for a dip only 500 yards wide separated them from their enemies, and sniping was constant, though the casualties were few. During the day the Boers never showed themselves in any strength, so great was the dread of our guns and horsemen.

Their most sensitive point was the Bridge road, which they were now preparing to defend by entrenchments at Plessis Poort. By constant pressure in this direction, French had already caused their convoys to abandon the main route and to make a detour through the hilly country to the east. On the 14th he sent a reconnaissance under Major Allenby towards the bridge. The column was formed of two weak squadrons of the 10th Hussars and the Inniskillings, two guns of R Battery, and two companies of Mounted Infantry. They reached a point within two miles of the bridge and had fired twenty shells at it, when the advance of the enemy caused them to retire. While returning the force were several times heavily fired on, and more than one attempt was made to intercept them. Five Dutch farmers were caught hiding in a farm-house and arrested. They had with them 600 rounds of ammunition and their waggons were standing ready loaded for the journey to the river. A week later the *Times* correspondent wrote that, judging from the different reports of scouts and patrols, who had by that time visited almost every farm in the neighbourhood, nearly all the Colonial Dutch had joined the enemy and were fighting against us. The only exceptions, in his opinion, were the better class of farmers who, from the fear of losing their property, preferred the part of spies to that of open enemies. Freedom of entry into the camps should no doubt have been denied to these men, and their farms watched. It is, however, questionable whether the information derived from the farmers, who were not trained spies, was of much value; at any rate, whatever its worth, the enemy made surprisingly

little use of it; and on the whole less was heard of the plague of spies in this part of the theatre of war than elsewhere. Besides the disaster of January 6th, only one mishap occurred during French's two months' campaign. This was the loss of a patrol of some twenty men of the South Australian Horse and New South Wales Lancers, who started on the morning of the 16th on a scouting expedition towards the Norval's Pont Railway. On their way home, when about six miles distant from camp, they were surprised by a party of sixty Boers, and on galloping off to take up a defensive position, found themselves surrounded. A volley at short range brought down half their horses, but the men continued to defend themselves behind the carcases until two were killed and seven or eight wounded. The remnant, with Lieutenant Dowling, were captured, Dowling himself, though twice wounded, refusing to surrender until a third bullet had stretched him on the ground. Three only escaped, through the timely aid of some of Rimington's Scouts. This misfortune seems to have been due to the action of a farmer, who informed the enemy of the whereabouts of the patrol, and so enabled them to intercept it.

On the 14th of January French's force was augmented by the arrival of the 2nd Worcesters, and on the 15th by that of the Royal Irish Rifles, with Major-General Clements and two howitzers of the 37th Battery. The 2nd battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment came up a few days later. A part, or the whole, of the Welsh and Yorkshire regiments were already on the spot, and other reinforcements were approaching the Cape, or making their way up-country from the ports. The British commander was therefore able further to extend his front, and as it was about this time that his lines received their greatest development, the disposition of his forces, as a remarkable example of enveloping tactics, may be conveniently noticed.

On January 18th General Clements went to Slinger's and took command of all the troops around and east of the Farm. Two battalions[1] were posted there in a commanding position well entrenched and fortified, together with one company of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles;

[1] The Royal Irish Rifles and the Worcestershire Regiment. See map, p. 164, for positions held by French's troops.

one squadron of the Composite Regiment and four guns of O Battery. At Potfontein, eight miles east and a little south of Slinger's, lay Colonel Porter with his own regiment, another squadron of the Composite Regiment,[1] a company of infantry, and the remaining two guns of O Battery. Five miles north of Porter at Kleinfontein was Major Rimington, with his guides, the third Household squadron, and the New South Wales Lancers. From this point he was able to watch and patrol the valley running north-east to within six miles of Norval's Pont. At the beginning of February he had an advanced post at Rhenoster Farm, close to the Boers guarding the railway. The Jasfontein post, after Rimington left it, was temporarily evacuated.

General French's headquarters, with half a battalion, two squadrons and two guns, were at Rensburg, whence he communicated with all the camps by wire, five sections of the telegraphic division being hard at work day and night. The centre of the left wing facing the western front was Coles Kop. The howitzers, which were first brought into action on the 29th, were posted on some bushy kopjes north-westward of Kloof Camp, so as to command Grassy Hill, the battery being directed by wire from the top of Coles Kop. The infantry held their old positions along the western front, viz., four companies of the Berkshire Regiment on Berkshire or MacCracken Hill, two companies of the 1st Essex Regiment and two of Mounted Infantry on the kopjes once held by the Suffolk Regiment, the Wiltshire and Yorkshire Regiments in the camps in rear. Porter's Hill was held by two guns of R Battery and two companies of the 1st Yorkshires, and Windmill Camp south of Hobkirk's Farm (three miles north-north-west of Coles Kop) by two squadrons of the 10th Hussars. The rest of the troops, including the Inniskillings, four field guns, four Horse Artillery guns, and the infantry above mentioned, were distributed between Rensburg and Maeder's Camps. The whole line was about thirty-five miles long, and was held by four regiments of cavalry (1,400 sabres and lances), twenty guns and howitzers, some 1,000 Mounted Infantry, Colonials and Scouts, and 4,000 to 4,500 regular infantry,

[1] These three squadrons belonged to the Household Cavalry.

in all about 7,000 men, giving an average of 200 men per mile. The opposing Boer force, which must, with the reinforcements received, have at least equalled French's troops, held a front of about twenty miles, from the Rietfontein Plessis Hills on the north to those above Achtertang on the east. In artillery they were weaker, having only about twelve guns, including pompoms; their mobility, man for man, was far greater, for French had at the most 2,500 mounted men, while every Boer had his pony. But as we have seen, their attempted counter-strokes were, in proportion to their numbers, weak and unsystematic. The inherent defects of their spirit and organisation made it impossible for them to obtain decisive results; and the British General, clearly recognising their comparative inefficacy in battle, adopted measures which would have been unjustifiable in front of regular troops, held together by discipline and impregnated with European traditions. While, with General French, we may do full justice to the special qualities of enemies "whose adroit skill in war demands the most untiring vigilance," we must admire the insight which enabled him to perceive their limitations, and to found upon them a plan of campaign which, fully developed, gave scope to the solidity, endurance, and discipline of his own troops, and pressed most severely upon the weak points of his opponents. By the occupation of a ring of carefully selected positions, strongly held by infantry and guns, he was able to make full use of the mobility of his mounted men, and to secure to them, in case of reverse, rallying points strong enough to withstand any counter attack the Boers were likely to make, and bases from which to carry out his offensive projects against the enemy's flanks and communications. We are inclined to think that a factor of his success was the Boer dread of the lance. The effects of its employment at Elandslaagte reached further than the slopes of the Biggarsberg, and the unwillingness of the burghers to expose themselves to its attack, even on ground where the Mauser could have made shock tactics impracticable, assured to the British Cavalry a striking superiority. This very refusal, however, to try conclusions between the bullet and the cold steel deprives the operations of nearly all their significance as a test of the relative value of the weapons, or as a guide to the probable result of a struggle between

Mounted Infantry and Cavalry in a European war. It was because the Boers, despite the endurance and handiness of their ponies, and their own skill in skirmishing, were inferior in battle to regular troops, that French's tactics could be employed at all.

During the days following Clement's arrival the usual skirmishing went on, mainly, however, on the eastern side of Colesberg, where the British artillery fire was less powerful, and the enemy's position more widely distributed. During this period French's general position steadily improved. A strong force of infantry had arrived at Naauwpoort, his own and Gatacre's patrols were in touch in the neighbourhood of Steynsburg, and on the 25th a part of Kelly-Kenny's Division (6th) occupied Thebus, that General being then at Naauwpoort. The time for a systematic invasion of Cape Colony had been allowed to pass unused. Gatacre's force had been considerably strengthened; Cronje was motionless in front of Methuen; and Pilcher's success at Douglas had for the moment put an end to the hopes of the disaffected west of the Kimberley railway. The local levies were increasing in number and efficiency, and the arrival of Lord Roberts had given a fresh impetus to the formation of new corps throughout the country. Any Boer success against French in the face of these extensive preparations and in the absence of any general plan of campaign, could be only ephemeral, and the enemy showed no intention of making the trial. The next move rested with the British commander. Already on January 12th Roberts had enquired as to the possibility of seizing Norval's Pont. It must be concluded that French deprecated an attempt on the point; for on January 25th, a message from him reached Capetown demanding more infantry, in order to set free the mounted troops for a forced march on Bethulie—probably by Rietfontein Drift. The proposal was negatived on the score of the opposition that would be encountered. In the meantime he had commenced an operation against the Boer position on the Colesberg Road.

His objective was the pass of Rietfontein Plessis, a gap in the range of hills six miles north of Colesberg, through which lay the route to the Road Bridge. He had reason to believe that this important point was either very weakly held or had been abandoned, and in order to

verify this information and, if it proved possible without serious fighting, to seize it, he moved out on the 26th with a force, consisting of 4 guns of R Battery, one squadron 6th Dragoons, and two squadrons 10th Hussars and some Mounted Infantry, under Brabazon; and four companies Yorkshire Regiment, four companies Essex Regiment, and the Wiltshire Regiment, with the 4th Field Battery under Colonel Stephenson. On the evening of the 25th De Lisle's Mounted Infantry had occupied Bastard's Nek five miles west of Rietfontein Plessis, and here the force concentrated on the following morning.

French proposed to demonstrate along the whole of the Boer lines, while the force at Bastard's Nek moved north and north-east against the Rietfontein kopjes, the infantry on the right, the Cavalry and Mounted Infantry on the left or outer flank. The artillery was to bring a cross fire to bear upon the Boer position, under cover of which the infantry were to advance and make the enemy show his strength, without seriously committing themselves. The mounted troops were to turn the main ridge from the northward, deal with any hostile movement from the Bridge, and seize with Mounted Infantry "a position to the east of that occupied by the Boers." [1]

The Cavalry, with Mounted Infantry and R Battery, moved out as ordered, and at 10 a.m. reached the northern or right flank of the Boer position north-west of the pass of Rietfontein Plessis. Here the guns came into action and together with the field battery, "which was posted at the northern foot of the main range, brought an effective cross fire to bear on a kopje where several groups of men and horses were observed." This drew fire from the two Boer guns which had been brought to the locality on January 5th, and the position was found to be strongly occupied. The turning movement was checked by two bodies of Boers from the north and west, the latter being greatly aided by the deep gorge of the Vandervalt River, which concealed their approach; and by the time these detachments had been pushed back it was too late in the day to continue the operations.

[1] Apparently by passing completely round their rear. The map gives us no help as regards the details of the country, and the exact whereabouts of the enemy's position cannot be gleaned from the despatch alone. See, however, sketch map, p. 164.

Meanwhile the infantry advanced towards the front of the Boer position, which appears to have run, roughly, from north-west to south-east, the right flank resting on the Rietfontein Ridge, the left on the Buffels Vley kopjes, thus covering the road and the pass. Further to the south it was continued by the hills between Buffels Vley and Colesberg. Against these last points the howitzers kept up a steady fire, while the half battalion of the Essex on Suffolk Hill supported the right wing of the British advance towards Buffels Vley. At 2.30 p.m., extended over a mile of front, the Wiltshires moved slowly forward over the plain, and between three and four in the afternoon had with the rest of the infantry mastered positions "so good as to give some promise of success in a general attack." As, however, the enemy showed in considerable numbers and the Cavalry had failed to complete their turning movement, French felt he was not justified in taking the risk, and at 4 p.m. ordered a general retirement. The event proved the correctness of his judgment. Scarcely had the advanced companies commenced to retire than a very heavy fire burst from the hitherto silent kopjes. With great order and steadiness the Wiltshire Regiment fell back, the mounted troops followed the movement, and by nightfall all were safe; our losses, thanks to the bad shooting and want of initiative of the enemy, only amounted to ten wounded. The whole of French's column regained their camp late in the evening, having in the two days covered some forty miles.

Meanwhile Major-General Clements had demonstrated against the enemy's extreme left. Porter's troops were brought into line with Rimington at Kleinfontein, and from this position the enemy were shelled out of Kleintoren Hill and driven back close on the railway towards the Achtertang laager, which was also subjected to a long-range fire. Clements himself with a squadron of the 1st Life Guards, the New Zealand Rifles, 6 companies of Worcesters, and 4 guns of O Battery moved from Slinger's and threatened the hostile ridges to the north, drawing fire from a long-range gun. As the troops retired the Worcesters were able to inflict some loss upon a party of pursuing Boers. The casualties as elsewhere were exceedingly slight.

This operation was the last mentioned in French's despatch of February 2nd. The last days in January saw the arrival of the rest of

Kelly-Kenny's division at Thebus, and the departure of French to Cape Town to confer with the Commander-in-Chief. On January 31st he returned and immediately began to move the great bulk of his mounted troops westwards to take part in the advance upon Kimberley. Before, however, his further fortunes can be followed, we must notice the state of affairs upon his flanks, and endeavour to summarise the situation when Lord Roberts suddenly abandoned the defensive, and commenced the decisive movement of the war.

Some part of the credit of the defence of Cape Colony belongs to Buller, who in the first instance ordered the movement on Colesberg; to French alone its success was due. He had checked the invasion, narrowed the recruiting area of the enemy, and pursued without serious reverse an aggressive policy in the face of superior numbers flushed by victory and materially helped by the surrounding population. With Methuen motionless and Gatacre's sphere of activity limited, everything depended on the demeanour of the central column; and had that too been paralysed by defeat or the timidity of its commander, the evil consequences of the other reverses would have been vastly aggravated. To Sir Alfred Milner the state of affairs in the north of Cape Colony, even at the beginning of February, appeared so critical, the tide seemed to be running so strongly with the invaders, that he advocated the formation of small fixed camps and mobile columns to crush rebellion before it had time to spread. This judgment, based on four months of anxious observation, marks the importance of French's operations, and shows to what dangers the interior of the Colony might by their failure have been exposed.[1] But French's campaign possessed more than a merely defensive value. The constant pressure which he brought to bear on Schoeman and De Wet, and the increasing embarrassment of those leaders, made Colesberg the one festering sore in the wide frame of Boer defence, and helped to sap the strength of the entire

[1] On January 30th Mr. Maydon heard the following opinion from a Mr. Armstrong, at Cradock:—The latter was anxious as to French's operations, and on Maydon asking him the reason, said that he had been warned by a well-known Dutch farmer to remove his property without delay, "as a rising of the Dutch in the Cradock district was arranged and was imminent." On asking "what they were waiting for," he received the reply, that "if only some disaster would befall French the whole district would be ablaze."

system. Here alone did the British maintain a successful offensive, and hither the enemy sent reinforcements from all parts of the Republics, thus involuntarily relieving the pressure on other British columns, and causing them to pursue still further their fatal and irrational policy of dilatory dispersion. That Methuen's communications were left practically untouched, that Gatacre was able to hold Sterkstroom for more than two months after his defeat without losing a hundred men, and that Lord Roberts was able to concentrate so strong a force on the Modder was mainly due to the efforts of French. If the composition of his force was far better adapted to the conditions than those of Methuen and Gatacre, it would be grossly unjust to deny to him the praise due to his endurance, and his remarkable insight into his opponents' character.[1]

[1] APPROXIMATE TABLE OF CASUALTIES SUFFERED DURING FRENCH'S OPERATIONS ROUND COLESBERG.

	OFFICERS.			MEN.		
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing and Prisoners.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing and Prisoners.
Cavalry						
Mounted Infantry...	3	4	3	24	79	10
Royal Horse Artillery						
Infantry	5	6	3	46	55	87
	8	10	6	70	134	97
Total	... 24 officers ...			... 311 men.		

CHAPTER IX

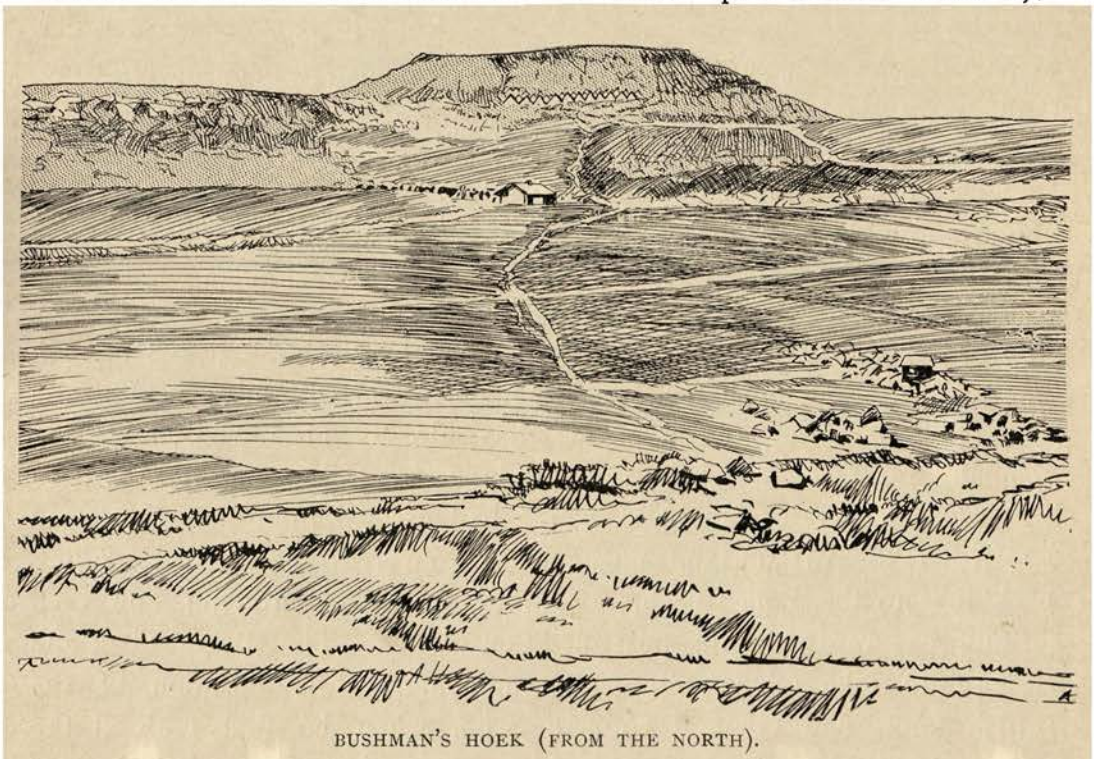
GATACRE AFTER STORMBERG (DECEMBER AND JANUARY, 1900)

GATACRE'S POSITION AFTER STORMBERG—ATTITUDE OF THE DUTCH—STRATEGIC DISADVANTAGES OF THE POSITION AT STERKSTROOM AND DORDRECHT—OPERATIONS OF DE MONTMORENCY—RECONNAISSANCE OF DECEMBER 22ND AND 28TH—FIGHT AT LABUSCHAGNE'S NEK—RESCUE OF MILFORD—EVACUATION OF DORDRECHT—BOER ATTACK ON THE CYPHERGAT POLICE CAMP—REPULSED—POLLOCK'S CRITICISMS—FEINTS AND RECONNAISSANCES DURING JANUARY—DISCORDANT RUMOURS—GATACRE'S POSITION AT THE END OF JANUARY—DID GATACRE USE HIS INFANTRY SUFFICIENTLY AT THE ADVANCED POSTS?—ATTACK ON BIRD'S RIVER AND PEN HOEK ON FEBRUARY 7TH

THANKS to the inactivity of the enemy, no strategic change on either side resulted from the defeat of Stormberg. On the afternoon of the fight, as has already been recounted, the remnant of Gatacre's infantry withdrew by rail from Molteno to Sterkstroom. Brabant's Horse, which had arrived from Pen Hoek too late to take part in the engagement, covered the retreat, falling back first to the Police Camp, two miles south of Molteno, and then retiring eastward to the post at Pen Hoek. The Boers made no attempt to take advantage of the momentary disorganisation of the British force, and General Gatacre, who, when he first realised the extent of his disaster, had ordered a general retreat upon Queenstown, determined, on the advice of Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffreys, to maintain the mountain posts at Bushman's Hoek and Pen Hoek and to establish his main body near the little village of Sterkstroom. Nothing of importance occurred until the 15th, when the other half battalion of the Royal Scots arrived, being followed on the next day by the 1st Battalion of the Derbyshire Regiment (1,100 strong) and the 79th Field Battery. These reinforcements made it possible to dispense with the services of the Northumberlands, who returned to East

London to be reorganised. As, owing to the requirements of other parts of the theatre of war, a further strengthening of the eastern column was impracticable, Gatacre was obliged, both by his orders and by the circumstances of the case, to remain on the defensive.

But though the dispositions of the opposing forces were almost identical with those that had obtained before the 10th of December, the moral effect of the repulse and of the consequent inactivity of the British force was unmistakable. "I heard upon reliable authority,"



BUSHMAN'S HOEK (FROM THE NORTH).

writes Major Pollock, "that some 400 Colonials joined the enemy since our defeat on Sunday. Naturally, numbers of those who were still wavering threw in their lot with their kinsmen." On the 20th he wrote to the *Times*:—"The only thing that has so far prevented a general rising of the Colonial Boers is the manifest determination of Great Britain to persevere until completely victorious. Boer loyalty has scarcely any appreciable existence except in the imagination of professional anti-Englanders." The reason why so many Dutchmen

refrained from openly joining the revolt was their feeling of uncertainty as to the result. "The moral effect of any great success upon either side just now would be tremendous." He thus goes on to explain the policy of annexation by proclamation. "The Free State troops invaded the Cape Colony only because they were pressingly invited to do so. Naturally, the commanders expected a great number of men from the territory invaded to join their standards, but they were doomed to disappointment, consequently proclamations were issued annexing the districts occupied and, this done, commandeering commenced in order to provide, under pressure, the recruits who had failed to join voluntarily. But the application of commandeering has been very partial; the rich Boers escaping it, and only the poor being enrolled for service without their own consent. As a body the well-to-do Boers will have nothing to say to rebellion unless they can clearly foresee its success, and since this remains improbable, outward 'loyalty' will be preserved to the end. Afterwards, rebels and arch-rebels will sing 'God save the Queen' with the best of us, and resume the paths of constitutional agitation."

Although spies had been at work in Cape Colony throughout the months preceding the outbreak of hostilities, and arms had been continually sent southward over the drifts, there is little doubt that the actual incentive to invasion came from our Dutch subjects. The above passage may be taken as a fair description of the attitude of most of them during the whole of the war. A British reverse or victory or the appearance of a Boer commando certainly affected the numbers of those fighting on the side of the enemy, but their sympathies throughout were with their own kindred and not with the Queen. Fortunately for the British, the Free Staters during the earlier months of the campaign failed to act with vigour, and the sentiments of their Colonial brethren were not strong enough to overcome their discretion. Later on, when the energy of De Wet and other leaders provided the commandos with a motive power, and a long period of warfare had inured the burghers to bolder methods, the efforts which should immediately have followed Stormberg were actually made. A blow was struck at the heart of Cape Colony and found not a few supporters

amongst a population which from the first had sympathised with the enemy, and had been exasperated by their failure and by grossly exaggerated reports of their sufferings. But it was then too late. The loyalists were organised for defence and the country was full of troops; while the invaders, weak in numbers and ill-furnished with supplies, had to live by a system of ruthless commandeering. What should have been a great combined advance upon Cape Town was called a raid, and rightly regarded as the offspring of the despairing obstinacy which then animated the remaining Boer leaders. Necessarily it failed, but the anxiety it caused affords a standard by which the probable effect of a more powerful irruption in December, 1899, can be measured.

One reason for the enemy's inaction seems to have been the belief that large forces were massing south of Sterkstroom. The knowledge that great stores of all kinds had been collected at that point ready for an advance on Bethulie, and the information as to our plan of campaign which fell into the enemy's hands at Dundee gave rise to the idea that the Sterkstroom column was the advanced guard of an army, and inclined the Boer commanders to caution. For all that Gatacre's position after Stormberg must have been trying in the extreme. He was operating in a very difficult country, his troops were less mobile than French's and had not recovered from the effects of a most demoralising reverse, while the enemy were proportionately elated. Nor was his strategic situation calculated to inspire confidence. He was tied down to a position from which, for military reasons, he could not advance, and, for political reasons, it was most inadvisable to retreat. He was holding an extended front along that most unreliable of barriers, a chain of rugged, but not insurmountable, hills, by penetrating which the enemy would have compelled him to retreat upon Queenstown to save his communications. His left flank, indeed, was partially protected by the hill-mass south of Molteno, and the post to the west of Steynsburg, through which he kept touch with French. The centre of his front was guarded by the entrenchments and garrison at the pass of Bushman's Hoek, a fairly good position in itself, but weakened by the rugged defile in its rear, through which the road and railway wound steeply down to Sterkstroom, 1,300 feet

below. The weakest point was the right. It was necessary to hold the hills running north of and parallel with the Indwe line as far as Pen Hoek pass, in a straight line more than twelve miles east of Bushman's Hoek, and some sixteen by road from Sterkstroom. Over this depression in the range ran the Jamestown-Queenstown road by which the Boers could threaten the British communications. Another track crossed the hills between Bushman's Hoek and Pen Hoek, and was watched by a patrol. Only the Hoeks were permanently occupied, a plan which was justified by the smallness of the force at General Gatacre's disposal and by the result, for, so far as we can discover, the enemy never tried to penetrate between them. But the fewness of his disposable troops, and the extent of the front guarded, made it impossible for Gatacre to occupy this part of his line in adequate strength, and if the enemy had pressed with vigour it is difficult to see how a retirement on Queenstown could have been avoided.

Continuing to the eastward, the next important point was Dordrecht, over forty miles from Sterkstroom. The town itself lies north-east of the pass called Naauwpoort and, as the road-junction from Aliwal North and Barkly East, was an obvious point of concentration for the invaders and rebels. It commanded a direct, though hilly, road to Queenstown, the railway as far as Indwe and other routes to Elliot and the eastern portion of Cape Colony. But in order to march on Queenstown from Dordrecht, the Boers would have to violate native territory, and Gatacre knew that orders had been given that the neutrality of these districts was to be scrupulously respected.

So far, therefore, as his communications were concerned, he had nothing to fear from Dordrecht and was able, by occupying a defensive position on Bird's River in rear of Pen Hoek, to concentrate his force within narrower limits. In the Dordrecht neighbourhood for ten days after Stormberg there remained only a detachment of Cape Police under Colonel Dalgety, who operated from Clarke's Siding, and served as a counterpoise to the bodies of rebels who were gathering round Jamestown.

But although the Boer policy of intrigue with the native chiefs was

dictated by motives of self-preservation rather than by the hope of active assistance, the situation in the north-east of Cape Colony and in Basutoland gave just cause for anxiety. The rich district of Barkly East had been for weeks in a state of open rebellion. From the first the white population was mainly composed of Dutch, and by the middle of December hardly an Englishman remained in the locality. The town of Barkly East had been occupied by the enemy of November 22nd, and as the result of the wholesale commandeering of stores the loyalists had streamed away in every direction. "Few came away with more than the clothes they stood in." Commandant Olivier annexed the district as he had done in the case of Aliwal North, and immediately commenced issuing arms to the "new burghers," whose numbers steadily increased; while the native population looked upon the demoralising spectacle of British families hurrying along the roads "to Queenstown, to Herschel, to Basutoland, to East Griqualand, and to the Transkei, . . . fortunate if they had still a waggon to convey them away from their empty farms."[1]

Across the Basutoland border there was abroad a spirit of unrest and distrust. It was always possible that the huge and inflammable zone of native tribesmen which embraced the eastern border of the Free State might become affected with the prevailing disloyalty. With little cause to love the Boers, the Basuto chiefs looked with increasing nervousness on the ominous reverses and withdrawals of their protectors. As elsewhere, the Boer Government had endeavoured by every means which a state of external peace permitted to render them amenable to their own designs. For months before the war broke out Boer agents had been at work, threatening, promising and lying. "Generally speaking," wrote Sir G. Lagden,[2] "I do not believe that there were any chiefs in Basutoland who were not approached by the Boers with the object of misleading, of distorting the real question at issue, of disparaging the power of England. . . . I could hold no public meeting without scores of native spies sent by the Boers being present to make mischief; every effort on our part to check border traffic and

[1] High Commissioner's Despatch, January 16 1900.
[2] Basutoland Report, 1899–1900.

avoid complications was undermined by the Free Staters encouraging the natives to defy our orders; tokens were sent to the chiefs which would pass their messengers freely into Boer camps; and finally, Republican proclamations . . . with garbled stories of British reverses printed in Sesuto, were circulated by President Steyn and disseminated discreetly in this territory. Both the Paramount Chief and Jonathan Malopo confided to me that they had received Free State official messages in the name of the President, to the effect that the Basutos must quickly choose their side; delay would be disastrous; if they took the English side it would be fatal to them."

We do not here propose to deal in detail with the attitude of the Basutos, a factor which became more important at a later stage, when the tide of war swept into the Free State and rolled hither and thither in a series of bewildering cross-currents under the very eyes of the vigilant tribesmen. It is sufficient to note that "the mass of perverted intelligence and intrigue held influence in the minds of the natives," and that as a consequence the early success of the Boers weighed heavily in the scale of disloyalty. The aim of Sir Alfred Milner, *i.e.*, the preservation of a strict neutrality, might easily have been thwarted by the precipitate action of a single chief, and, as a matter of fact, the chief Nkuebe in the Quthing district next to that of Barkly East, was certainly disposed to listen to the representations of Boers and Dutch rebels. "He lent himself to them in a questionable way during the unsettling stages following upon the Stormberg disaster. . . . His spies received facilities from the enemy to observe with their own eyes what appeared as the overwhelming force and success of the Republics then on British soil, and no permission of ours or appeals to loyalty could obliterate these visions." Luckily he did nothing to commit himself seriously, and a detachment of loyal police sent from Maseru to the Drakensburg passes, which were within his sphere, "had the effect of detaching waverers and commanding his assistance." Greater trouble was given by another chief named Mocheko, who endeavoured to stir up rebellion against the Paramount Chief, and ultimately removed into the Herschel district. Here he was disarmed and relegated to safe custody at Maseru by Major Hook, who had most opportunely arrived

at Herschel as Commissioner. Yet a third chief, the young Letsie, the eldest son and heir of the Paramount Chief, yielded for a time to the advances of Munnik, the newly appointed Landrost of Aliwal North who, once Magistrate of Barkly East, had been dismissed for misconduct, had become a Transvaaler, and had now returned as a ringleader of the rebellion, The trying position of Sir Godfrey Lagden and General Gatacre will be realised when it is remembered that the country between Dordrecht and Basutoland was entirely denuded of troops, that the English General had none to send, and that Lagden, to whom a levy *en masse* of the Basutos did not for many internal reasons commend itself, could only dispose of a few native police. All that General Gatacre could do was to keep the enemy's forces around Barkly East and Jamestown employed; and it was natural that the first enterprise that he deemed himself strong enough to prosecute, should take the shape of an operation on his eastern flank.

The first sign of revived activity on the part of the British was De Montmorency's movement on Dordrecht on the morning of December 22nd. Some nine miles west of the town, with a patrol of fifty men, partially composed of the Scouts he himself had chosen and organised, that most capable officer came in contact with thirty Boers who fled, leaving a waggon and three rifles in his hands. Reinforced by an armoured train and a squadron of Brabant's Horse under Fielden, he next day drove nearly double the number of Boers into Dordrecht, bivouacked on the ridge overlooking the town, and demanded reinforcements. These were not granted and De Montmorency was instructed to retire; an unfortunate order, for he had scarcely done so when Dalgety, with 150 Police, moving westwards from Clarke's siding, entered the town from the opposite side. Had De Montmorency been allowed to remain, or had Dalgety moved faster, it is possible that some of the commando he had driven in the day before would have been captured. As it was, nothing worthy of mention beyond the entry of the town was effected; Dalgety seems to have retired in the direction whence he came, and the rebels, most of whom had fled to their farms on his approach, were again able to gather head. During the following days attempts were made to re-open communication with

the Indwe collieries, but nothing of importance occurred until the 28th, when De Montmorency with thirty Scouts were sent by train to Dordrecht with orders to discover the positions and strength of the enemy reported to be in the neighbourhood. A mixed force consisting of a squadron of Brabant's Horse, some Cape Police, and Cape Mounted Rifles, with four muzzle-loading 7-pounders, the whole under Captain Goldsworthy, Cape Mounted Rifles, were encamped to westward of the town when the Scouts arrived. Next day, in weather so bad that scouting was practically impossible, De Montmorency marched in the hopes of locating two commandos, one large and one small, said to be laagered six miles north-west of the town. Not a Boer was seen, but "as the result of the day's work the existence of the small commando as an isolated unit was considered to be disproved," and a more elaborate reconnaissance was arranged for the following day with the intention of discovering the position of the larger one.

A part of Goldsworthy's force was placed under De Montmorency, and early in the morning Captain de Cerjat, with an English farmer as guide, rode out towards Labuschagne's Nek in the hope of getting a view of the laager beyond it. He was prevented from doing so by a Boer patrol, and De Montmorency, who had waited some time for his report, determined to push on without it. Time, however, had been lost, and the Boers to the number of 800 with two guns had occupied the nek and the adjoining hills.

Some $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Dordrecht the road, along which De Montmorency's advanced patrol, which he himself accompanied, was proceeding, mounts sharply to a plateau, and skirts the hills held by the enemy for over a mile before turning to the right towards the nek. This plateau was separated from the overhanging ridges by a deep donga which, just at the point where the road crosses it and bends to the right, curves round with equal abruptness to the left. At 12.45 p.m. a scout on a hill to the right was fired on, and De Montmorency, galloping to the donga crossing, placed the horses under cover and commenced replying to the fire which was immediately poured upon his right flank from the ground below the nek. Orders were sent to the main body to line the donga to his left so as to guard against a

turning movement, and a small party was placed in that part of the donga parallel to the road to check any attack upon his right rear.

But before the main body had had time to take up their positions the Boers, swarming over the hills to northward of the nek had taken the offensive. Seeing the weakness of De Montmorency's party at the crossing, they galloped down and tried to turn his left flank. With a few men he dashed along the Boers' side of the donga under cover of some rising ground, opened a rapid fire and drove the enemy off. At this moment, at Major Pollock's suggestion, De Cerjat, who had just returned from his unsuccessful reconnaissance, sent a trooper of Brabant's Horse back to Dordrecht asking Goldsworthy for reinforcements. At 2.35, after heavy firing, the Boers made another attempt to turn Montmorency's left, but were beaten off by Flanigan, who held the head of the ravine with some of Brabant's Horse.

The firing still continuing heavy, Montmorency determined to retire on the picket left to cover his right rear, which had taken up a position on some rocks between the road and the donga. He reinforced this with his Scouts, and when Goldsworthy arrived at 3.40 the whole of the detachment, with the exception of Milford's party near the donga-crossing and a covering party under Flanigan, had been withdrawn in safety. Believing that Milford had received the order to fall back, and having himself failed to find him, De Montmorency concluded that he had retired, and turned his attention to some Boers who were engaging Flanigan. After a series of skirmishes the force retired to Dordrecht along the deep valley which borders the left or south-west side of the plateau. Not till late in the evening did a messenger from Milford confirm the suspicions which his non-appearance had aroused.

Under cover of the night the man had escaped back to camp bringing the news that the party were cooped up in the donga, and nearly all the horses were killed. In great anxiety Montmorency urged that their relief should at once be attempted, and himself started with seven men in the hope of finding Milford and bringing him a supply of ammunition. Goldsworthy followed at 2.30 a.m., and on reaching the plateau found that his subordinate had discovered Milford, and that

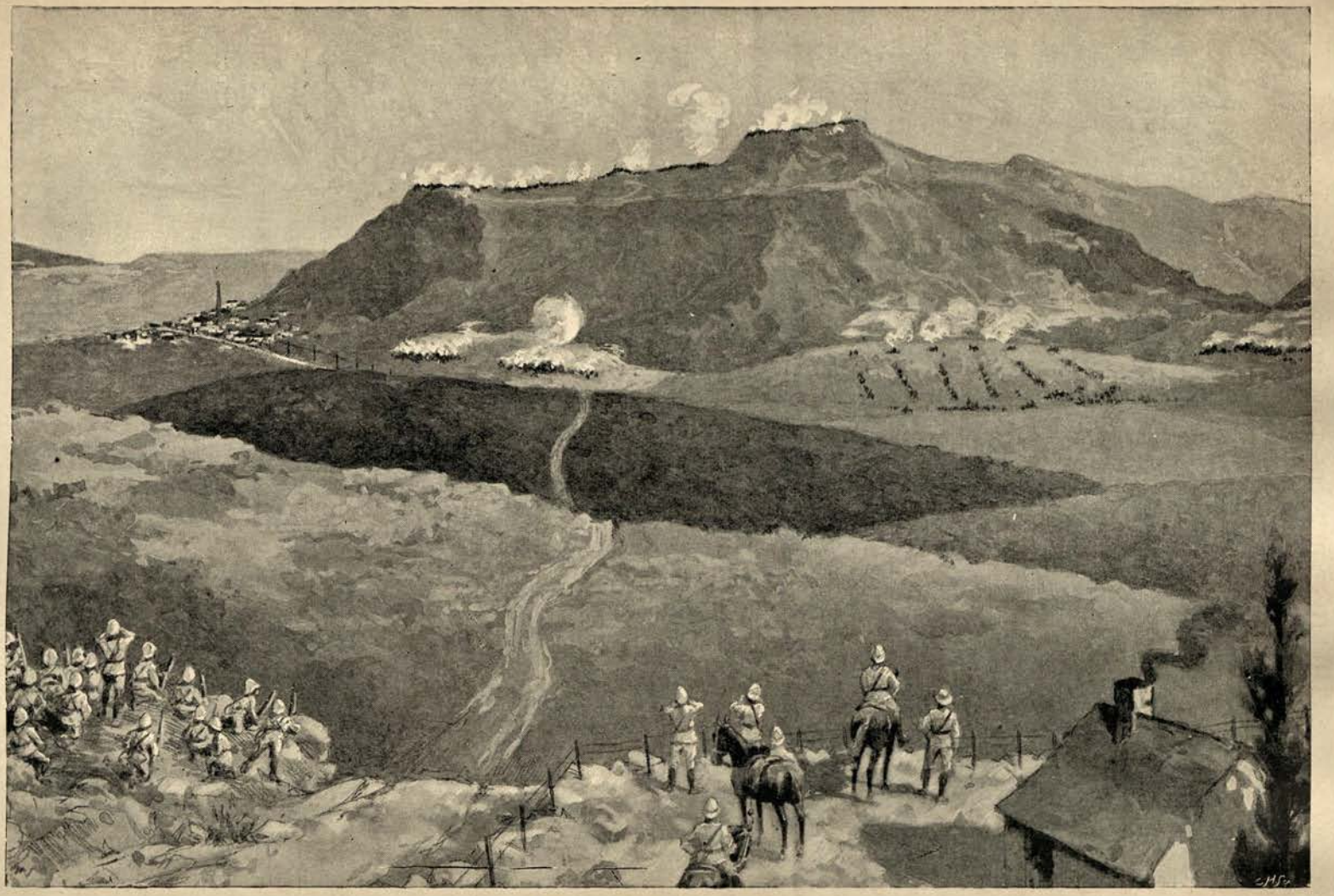
the latter was safe. Dividing his men, he sent some forward with horses to bring the party off while he dismounted the rest to cover his right flank. The plan succeeded completely, probably owing to the fact that the Boers, having shifted their artillery so as to take Milford's position in flank, were unable to sweep that part of the donga parallel to the road along which the rescue party advanced. Not until the operation had been completed did the Boer guns open fire, directing their aim upon the group of bearers of Lieutenant Warren, who, relying on the forbearance of the enemy, had crossed the plateau instead of keeping along the donga. No one was hit, however, and after being under shell fire for three-quarters of an hour, the whole force returned to camp.

To Montmorency's boldness and initiative the rescue was mainly due. Milford, who had had thirty-five men under him along the bank of the donga, had been heavily engaged from the commencement of the fight. He had kept the enemy at bay, despite their superior numbers, until a large party, having Kaffirs in front of them dressed like black police, trotted quietly forward, and being mistaken for friends were allowed to approach. When quite near two of them moved to the right and hoisted a white flag, whereupon the remainder galloped swiftly to a position which commanded Milford's flank, and enabled them to bring a deadly fire to bear on the horses. The men with the flag were shot, but the trick was discovered too late. Milford found it necessary to move his men, a change of position which accounted for De Montmorency's failure to find the party. Left to themselves, the little band had fought on against increasing numbers while light lasted, by which time Milford had twenty-six horses killed and seven injured. The loss in men was slight, viz., Lieutenant Warren mortally and two men slightly wounded. There were eight Boers killed and twenty-two wounded; two of their horses were taken and thirty-three lay dead around the gallantly defended post.

On the evening of the same day Dordrecht was evacuated without interference from the enemy, Dalgety (Cape Mounted Rifles) and Goldsworthy both falling back upon the Bird River position. The withdrawal from Dordrecht, which has been criticised as premature and

likely to have a bad moral effect, was dictated by the needs of the military situation at Sterkstroom. Not only, for the reasons given above, was it certain that the enemy would not attempt to march through Herschel to Queenstown, but also the rebellion, real as it was, had added little to the enemy's strength in the field. The Barkley East and Jamestown rebels were, as soldiers, very harmless and unaggressive. The true fighting forces of the enemy were at Stormberg. It was General Gatacre's constant aim to strengthen Bushman's Hoek, and to keep the enemy in front of it in a continual state of apprehension of an attack from that direction. As has been already said, the Boers expected us to take the offensive on the Sterkstroom-Bethulie line, and the British General did all in his power by constant movements and counter-movements behind the Stormberg massif to foster the notion. Amongst others, Montmorency's sudden retirement from Dordrecht was well calculated to give the idea that a concentration was in rapid progress. The best reply that the enemy could make was obviously to seize some position, preferably Bushman's Hoek, on the hills overlooking Sterkstroom, so as to be able to observe the British movements or to repel the anticipated attack. Had they captured the Hoek Gatacre must have retired to Queenstown, for from the south the position was almost impregnable and Sterkstroom would have become untenable. Realising this they decided to risk an attack. At daybreak on January 3rd an English farmer, who lived some miles to the east of Bushman's Hoek, saw a column of Boers, 700 strong, with a gun, making their way over the dim ridges to the westward in the direction of the Loperberg. This high ridge, overhanging Cyphergat and situated on the east of the road and railway, halfway between Molteno and Bushman's Hoek, was occupied early in the morning by a force of some 2,000 burghers, with one of the 15-pounders we had lost at Stormberg. At the same moment an equally strong body with two guns moved from that place upon Molteno and opened a heavy converging fire with guns and rifles upon the Camp, two miles south of the village, then garrisoned by some Cape Police under Inspector Neylan and a few Kaffrarian Rifles under Captain Maclean.[1] This

[1] Gatacre in the telegram sent home on that day of the fight, said that the post



THE ACTION AT CYPERGHAT.

advanced post, which was badly placed for purposes of defence, was thus attacked by enormously superior numbers, and completely cut off from Bushman's Hoek. At 8 a.m. the Boers on the Loperberg began throwing shells in the direction of the pass, and their evident strength and apparent determination seemed to prelude a severe engagement. At 10.45 Gatacre reached the top of Bushman's Hoek, but the artillery, when the alarm was given, were absent on a field-day, and this circumstance, together with the long and steep road up the pass, considerably delayed their arrival and the employment of the remainder of the force, which could not act effectively without the support of guns. The armoured train, which had brought the infantry, ventured out into the plain towards the foot of the Loperberg, and was promptly driven back by the enemy's shell fire. It was 1.30 p.m. before the 79th Battery reached the summit of the gorge. and another hour elapsed before it got into action. The firing to northward was still extremely heavy, but little could be done to help the Police until the Boers had been driven from the Loperberg. The morning was occupied by the preparatory advance of Thornton's and Dewar's Mounted Infantry[1] who, accompanied by De Montmorency's Scouts, moved to the right of the railway straight towards the Loperberg in order to seize some of the lower kopjes and clear the ground for the artillery. In spite of a vigorous fire of shrapnel the necessary progress was made, and by 1 p.m. a section of Mounted Infantry were far enough forward to drive a body of Boers out of Cyphergat, the population of which village, largely consisting of miners, had already fled in panic to the protection of the British camps.

Simultaneously with the arrival of the artillery at Bushman's Hoek, De Montmorency began a movement to his left; under a heavy fire his scouts galloped one by one across the railway, and then, covered by the slopes of the plateau that lies west of the line facing the Loperberg, worked northward with the intention of reaching the Police Camp and

was 250 strong. Major Pollock places it at 111, including 58 Kaffrarian Rifles under Maclean. Possibly in his estimate Gatacre included Thornton's company of Berkshire Mounted Infantry, 111 strong, and De Montmorency's 30 Scouts, who reached the Police Camp in the afternoon.

[1] Apparently two companies were employed.

supporting Neylan. Everything depended upon the guns, and at half-past two Armitage's battery, the only one for some reason that was present, took up a position to the right of the railway on the low ground cleared by the Mounted Infantry, and opened fire on the Boers on the Loperberg—a range of 4,500 yards. The effect was magical; after the third shrapnel the enemy disappeared; indeed, the battery only fired twelve shots during the whole of the day. Three of these took full effect, one of them smashing the elevating gear of the British 15-pounder the. Boers were using, the others falling into the thick of the enemy who were retiring in crowded masses down the northern and eastern slopes of the hill. Thornton now followed De Montmorency, and both pushed hastily forward to the Police Camp, the defenders of which, by a timely retirement to some neighbouring rocks, had not sustained a single casualty. The Boer fire, which had been accurately directed upon the empty trenches of the camp, had thus been entirely ineffective. When, however, the enemy, deceived by the silence of the garrison, advanced to the attack, they were met with a sudden and heavy fire, and driven off with some loss. By 5.30 p.m. all firing had ceased, the Boers having made good their retreat to the north and eastward. Their losses must have been appreciable; the British by good fortune and good management had not lost a single man.

For the rest of January no serious movement on either side took place. The weakness of General Gatacre's force, his instructions, and the long front he had to defend account for his inactivity, while on the side of the Boers, beyond their ordinary lack of offensive power and the discouragement that may have resulted from the fight round Cyphergat, French's successes were making themselves felt. It is extremely probable that detachments to the westward were made at this time, although, in spite of these, in the middle of January the Boer force in the district still numbered 4,500, and the various reconnaissances made from time to time showed that it was still too strong to be attacked.

One of these expeditions took place on January 8th, when a column consisting of two batteries, 400 mounted men, and the Derby-

shire Regiment, left Sterkstroom for Molteno with the object of seizing the flour and meal at the Molteno mills and examining the Stormberg position. The first part of the operation was easily completed; the second undertaken by the 79th Battery and the mounted troops under Colonel Jeffries, R.A., proved that the enemy held the Stormberg range in force. The country was surveyed by a party of Engineers, but beyond the exchange of a few shots, between the advanced scouts and a Boer patrol, there was no fighting. On January 14th fifty Frontier Mounted Rifles were despatched to Steynsburg in order to join hands with French's Colonials, who were occupying that place, and so render the Boers apprehensive of a combined attack by troops from both columns upon Stormberg. The detachment returned on the 24th after getting in touch with French and probably arresting the march of a commando from Bethulie on Colesberg. Next day Kelly-Kenny's division began to concentrate at Thebus with the object of repairing the railway and further disquieting the enemy. The latter were playing the game of bluff with equal success. Throughout the month alarms, almost certainly manufactured by Boer agents, were constant. One of these on the night of the 14th resulted in an unnecessary movement of troops to Molteno, but advantage was taken of this to send De Montmorency on a reconnaissance towards Stormberg; and on the 16th he pushed up to within three miles of the Rooi Kop. At first very few Boers were visible, but later in the day the Scouts and Police, after driving off a quantity of cattle, had to fall back before a strong party which followed them for some distance, firing freely, but hitting no one. The laagers south of the junction had disappeared, and some said that the enemy had withdrawn to Burghersdorp, others that they had gone to Colesberg. The whole of the Cape frontier was in a state of nebulous agitation. Commandos dispersed and reformed; the air was full of rumours of movements and reinforcements, of native risings and Boer privations. On the 18th three culverts were blown up near Dordrecht; the commando there was estimated as 1,000 strong, and a raid upon Indwe was momentarily expected; while further eastward about Elliot the Griqualand forces were reported to have restored confidence to the

natives and to be keeping the disloyal in check. Over everything hung the fog of war and rebellion, and neither side was strong enough to clear the air by a decisive blow.

Probably the enemy were at this time more disquieted than ourselves. Symptoms of a change were becoming visible. Troops were pouring into South Africa; the loyal Colonists were rallying fast round the flag, and it was generally felt that the initiative was passing into British hands. Gatacre, indeed, was bound by Lord Roberts's orders to the defensive; but his force had been considerably strengthened. By the end of January he had under him three field batteries (74th, 77th, 79th), the 1st Derbyshire Regiment, the Royal Irish Rifles, the Northumberland Fusiliers (now reinforced by strong drafts), the Royal Scots Fusiliers, half the Berkshire Regiment, the 12th Company Royal Engineers, and about 1,200 Mounted Infantry. They were disposed as follows:—At Bushman's Hoek, under the command of Colonel Smith-Dorrien, were the Derbyshire Regiment, two field batteries, and two or three companies of Mounted Infantry. With the exception of three companies of infantry all the troops had been moved to the ridges south of Phillip's Farm, where there was a good camping ground. The camp was protected frontally by loopholed breastworks and by the redoubts on the summit of Bushman's Hoek, while its right was covered by the Loperberg, held since January 17th by a detachment of 300 men consisting mainly of Kaffrarian Rifles. The artillery horses especially benefited by the new disposition, as they had no longer to drag their guns from Sterkstroom to the top of the pass whenever an alarm was given. The Police Camp appears still to have been held as an advanced post. At Sterkstroom was the remaining battery, the Royal Irish Rifles, and the Northumberlands, forming a central reserve and guarding the masses of stores and baggage collected there. On Bird's River were two squadrons of Cape Mounted Rifles under Dalgety. Pen Hoek, tactically a far stronger position than Bushman's Hoek, had been occupied for some weeks by four Cape Mounted Rifle 7-lb. muzzle-loading guns, and four squadrons of Colonial Horse; and on January 27th the garrison was reinforced by 5 companies of the Royal Scots, an arrangement which freed the mounted

men for the performance of their proper duties. The pass was guarded by two kopjes east and west of the road, but the weak point of the position lay in a ridge 3,500 yards to the north, whence the Boer artillery could have fired with effect and, so far as the obsolete 7-pr. muzzle-loaders were concerned, with impunity. It was to neutralise this disadvantage that emplacements were dug for two of these guns some five hundred yards in front of the main position, and that on February 1st a section of the 79th Battery was sent round from Sterkstroom. The eastern kopje, until the arrival of the Royal Scots, had been held by three squadrons of Brabant's Horse.

The presence of the battalion enormously increased the offensive and defensive power of the position. Before the infantry were sent there was an obvious and serious disadvantage in garrisoning it with mounted troops alone, thus wasting their mobile power and, in case they were seriously attacked, rendering the loss of their horses from want of water exceedingly probable, as the only pond was nearly two miles off and unapproachable in the presence of the enemy. It would seem that General Gatacre did not until the last two or three weeks of his sojourn at Sterkstroom employ infantry as pivots of manœuvre as much as he might have done. We have seen how economically and successfully this method was applied under French, and admitting the more difficult conditions that obtained in the case of Gatacre, there certainly appears no reason why infantry should not have been sent to hold the camp at Pen Hoek if not to Bird's River. Up to the end two battalions were always retained at Sterkstroom to guard the stores or to act as a reserve, a large proportion when, as was the case at the end of December, there were only three battalions available in all. The result was that a considerable part of the mounted men holding the passes were constantly employed in duties which would have been better and more cheaply done by infantry, while their own offensive power was greatly impaired. On January 12th, Colonel Dalgety with two squadrons, failed to punish a Boer commando of 300 men engaged in reaping crops within three miles of his position, because after having provided for the safety of his camp his remaining force was too weak, in his opinion, to justify

the attempt. A freer employment of the infantry would assuredly have been profitable. No doubt in the presence of a bolder enemy General Gatacre would have been justified in not exposing half or quarter battalions in isolated situations from which retreat might have been difficult or impossible; against a force which possessed so little offensive energy as did the Boers in January, 1900, liberties could safely be taken.

One more engagement in the Sterkstroom district must be recorded before we proceed to describe the state of affairs at Kimberley and on the Modder. On February 7th the enemy, who for some time had been gathering strength in the direction of Dordrecht, made a deliberate and concerted effort upon the British right, the course which should have been adopted immediately after Stormberg. By a night march they unexpectedly concentrated against Pen Hoek and Bird's River, threatening at the same time the British front at Molteno. At 6 a.m. they commenced attacking Pen Hoek and the Bird's River position. The movement on Pen Hoek was clearly intended as a feint, for the firing continued but a short time and at a long range. The only incident worth noting was the capture of seven of Brabant's Horse while on patrol. The attack on Dalgety was more serious. Bringing a 14½-pr. Creusot on to a ridge 5,000 yards from the camp, the Boers commenced throwing shell with great speed and accuracy, under cover of which a number of their riflemen pushed forward, entered the bed of the river and fired heavily upon the British trenches. An armoured train from Sterkstroom had to fall back before the enemy, who brought three guns into action, but efforts to turn our right and drive in our front failed before the steady front of A Company of the Royal Scots, and in retreating the assailants suffered some loss from the shell fire of two 7-pounders.[1] Later in the day the arrival of Gatacre with four companies of infantry, a battery of artillery, and some of Brabant's Horse caused the final retirement of the enemy, who were heavily shelled as they withdrew. The British casualties were one killed and three wounded; those of the Boers were unknown.

[1] At the end of January these guns with two companies of the Royal Scots, 150 Cape Mounted Rifles, 40 Talanga Rifles, and 2 machine guns formed the Birds' River garrison.

With the repulse of this somewhat half-hearted attack the defensive operations of Gatacre practically terminated. He was soon to be reinforced by Brabant's Colonial Division, and in conjunction with Clements, whose operations after French's departure have still to be described, to drive the enemy over the Orange River. It is characteristic of Boer methods that during the two months that followed Stormberg they had only attacked him twice, and that these actions, together with the multifarious affairs of outposts and De Montmorency's operations at Dordrecht, had cost the British barely thirty men.

CHAPTER X

THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF KIMBERLEY HEIGHTENED BY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES — ITS VALUE IN KEEPING A LARGE BOER FORCE OCCUPIED—REASONS WHICH DICTATED THE SENDING OF METHUEN'S COLUMN — POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES AND FINAL RESULT — IMPORTANCE OF KIMBERLEY IN THE BRITISH SCHEME OF DEFENCE—RETARDING ACTION OF THE CAPE GOVERNMENT ON THE DEFENCE PREPARATIONS—ARRIVAL OF IMPERIAL OFFICERS—KEKEWICH'S TASK—ORGANISATION OF LOCAL FORCES—THE TOWN GUARD—ITS VALUE—MOUNTED FORCES—WANT OF MODERN ARTILLERY—POSITION OF KIMBERLEY—INCLUSION OF BEACONSFIELD IN THE ENCEINTE — SYSTEM OF DEFENCES—NUMBER OF THE POPULATION — SUPPLIES AVAILABLE—OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES—WITHDRAWAL OF THE POLICE FROM THE FRONTIER—FORMATION OF THE INVESTMENT — SKIRMISH OF OCTOBER 24TH—SUMMONS TO SURRENDER —BOER OFFERS TO RECEIVE CIVILIAN POPULATION—THE NATIVE QUESTION—THE FIRST BOMBARDMENT—ADVANCE OF RELIEF FORCE — THE SORTIES OF NOVEMBER 25TH AND 28TH—DEATH OF SCOTT TURNER—PAUSE IN THE MILITARY OPERATIONS—THE QUESTION OF SUPPLY—HORSES KILLED—INCREASE OF DISEASE—MORTALITY IN KIMBERLEY—LONG CECIL—SECOND BOMBARDMENT—APPEARANCE OF BOER 6-IN. GUN—COULD SUFFICIENT COVER HAVE BEEN AFFORDED?—PANIC IN THE TOWN — DEATH OF LABRAM—WOMEN AND CHILDREN LOWERED INTO THE MINES—FRENCH'S ADVANCE—ALEXANDERSFONTEIN EVACUATED BY THE ENEMY—ARRIVAL OF FRENCH—SKILFUL DEFENCE OF KEKEWICH—HIS MAIN DIFFICULTY INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION—FRICTION WITH THE CIVILIAN POPULATION—COLONEL KEKEWICH AND MR. RHODES—SERVICES OF THE LATTER—HIS CONDUCT—HIS APPEALS FOR HELP IN OCTOBER AND IN FEBRUARY—REPLY OF LORD ROBERTS—SUMMARY.

BY the middle of December, 1899, Kimberley had become the most prominent factor in the southern theatre of war. Strictly speaking, the attention it attracted was out of all proportion to its military importance. It was neither a fortress nor an arsenal; it was not on the direct route to Capetown or Bloemfontein; it was not, even when the Colesberg and Bethulie bridges were in the hands of the enemy, absolutely essential as a base for an expedition against the Free State Capital. The tide of invasion, whether British or Dutch, might have left it unmolested; and the war might have been decided without a gun being fired within earshot of its houses. A certain military value, as being a source of supply and a road and railway centre, it possessed in

common with every large town. But these qualities were only subjective; and, as at the commencement of hostilities, more direct lines of supply and more conveniently situated bases were available for both sides, there was no particular reason from a military point of view why either should have turned aside to make use of the Kimberley route. Had the enemy adopted the policy that alone offered a chance of ultimate success and concentrated his whole force upon the Orange River for the effective invasion of Cape Colony, Kimberley would only have played the part of an anxious spectator.

But strategy is a "system of makeshifts," and, as has been pointed out in the *Times* history, it was tolerably certain that the Boers would not pass Kimberley without a stroke at the diamond fields of which they had been robbed and the city of their arch-enemy, Cecil Rhodes. The same assumption applied to Mafeking, another piece of territory of which they considered themselves unjustly deprived and the starting-point of the Jameson Raid. That these towns would be chosen as objects for attack was all the more likely at a time when the invasion of Cape Colony seemed, for various reasons, highly improbable; at any rate, if they were defended, they might suffice to hold fast a part of the enemy's forces and so prevent his throwing his entire strength on the Orange River before the main British force was in the field. A consideration of yet greater importance was the possible effect of the abandonment of Kimberley upon the Dutch, and especially the native populations, at a time when our paucity of troops made it impossible to obliterate the impression of this loss by a decisive success elsewhere. Indeed, it may be said that such a contingency would have been only less disastrous than the fall of Ladysmith itself, as well as inconsistent with the policy of bluff which the inadequate forces in the Colony made our only means of defence, and, thanks to the enemy's military limitations, was to prove so remarkably successful.

The hypothesis that the Boers would allow themselves to be lured aside by the hope of these secondary prizes proved to be a true one. Within a few days of the outbreak of the war 11,000 of the burghers were gathering round the two towns. For more than a month the

energies of about two-thirds of their fighting men on the western and southern frontiers were held fast by 4,000 civilians and volunteers and a few hundred regular troops; nor does it seem likely that even after Cronje's advance to Kimberley more than 3,000 or 4,000 of the besieging armies would have left the lines of investment and come south to take part in the invasion of the Colony. So far Mafeking and Kimberley had done all, and more than all, that had been expected of them. How came it then that this excellent economy of force was disturbed by sending Methuen's column to relieve Kimberley?

Let us look for a moment at the general situation. Sir Redvers Buller's change of plan, which diverted a full half of the army corps to Natal, had made decisive action in the Free State impossible. But it was very important, politically and strategically, that we should not be reduced to a defence merely passive. The question was on what point the bulk of the 15,000 troops concentrating in the Colony could most profitably be employed? Broadly speaking there were two alternatives: either Kimberley should be left to take care of itself and the blow struck from Naauwport and Sterkstroom, or Kimberley should be relieved, and made, if possible, the centre of an active defence of our western territories. In which quarter was the need of help most urgent?

There is no question that Kimberley had the first claim; not, as Colonel Kekewich was able to inform Sir Redvers Buller, on account of the real dangers to which it was exposed, but because the attitude of its leading citizens seemed calculated to weaken the *morale* of its large population and so to diminish its power of resistance. It was not the first time in history that a civilian panic has threatened the fall of a fortress, and throughout the siege the danger from without was less than that from within. Scarcely had Sir Redvers Buller landed than there reached him "a series of telegrams[1] from Mr. Rhodes and

[1] Telegram of De Beers Directors to the High Commissioner, October 31, 1899: "We hope with the arrival of General Buller measures will be taken for the immediate relief of this place. Our information, which is reliable, gives not more than 2,000 to 3,000 Boers between this place and Orange River, and in our opinion we could have been relieved without risk by the present force in Cape Colony," &c.

others at Kimberley, all crying out loudly for relief, and one of them hinting at surrender if relief were withheld."[1] For the reasons already given he could not contemplate the possibility of its fall with indifference, and he was all the more ready to undertake its relief because there was good reason for believing that a successful result would have consequences out of all proportion to the difficulties of the undertaking. The country between the Orange River and Kimberley was open, the physical obstacles comparatively insignificant, and the numbers of the enemy only amounted to 4,000 or 5,000 men.[2] It was hoped that Lord Methuen would be able to inflict a decisive defeat on this force, throw a battalion and a half with a few long-range guns into the town, re-open the railway and remove the bulk of the civilian population whose presence constituted the only real danger. He was then to fall back to Orange River Bridge and make the best of his way eastwards to Naauwpoort and Bethulie, join hands with French and Gatacre, drive the invaders from the northern districts of Cape Colony, and occupy and place the bridges in readiness for the main advance. The relief of Kimberley was intended as a temporary measure for the removal of a temporary entanglement at a moment when decisive action elsewhere was impossible. It was not meant to govern or affect the main strategic plan when the moment for its execution arrived; but, on the contrary, to free it from an incubus which, from the nature of the case, must have grown more and more burdensome as time went on. If Cronje had remained at Mafeking the scheme would have certainly succeeded.

Such being the known circumstances at the moment when the expedition was despatched, we find it very difficult to blame either General Buller for the attempt[3] or Lord Methuen for its failure.

[1] Royal Commission General Buller's Evidence, vol. ii. pp. 171, 172. "I feared the effect of its fall upon the native mind in general and upon the Basutos in particular. Moreover, though I felt the fullest confidence in Colonel Kekewich, I did not trust the other powers within the city."

[2] When Lord Methuen started it was not known that Cronje, who had left Mafeking only a few hours before, was moving southwards.

[3] Sir Redvers Buller, vol. ii. p. 174, and Question 15182, speaks of a desperate situation requiring desperate measures.

Moreover, if, as is undeniable, the Boer investment of the town in some degree forced the former's hand; if the appearance of Cronje and the consequent reverse of Magersfontein rendered Methuen's success impossible,[1] it is also true that the presence of that general on the Modder carried with it certain striking advantages. An important Boer force was compelled, or thought itself compelled, to conform to our movements. By sending Lord Methuen to relieve Kimberley the Commander-in-Chief, whether consciously or not, threatened one of the most cherished enterprises of his opponents, and, by menacing the blockade, afforded to the western line and the Orange River a degree of protection which, owing to the length of the front and the small comparative mobility of his troops, might not easily have been ensured by other means. Again, Methuen's presence in front of Cronje greatly reduced the dangers to which the town was exposed, and incidentally facilitated the task of Lord Roberts. That the result was so good was due not more to the perverse tenacity with which the enemy clung to the hope of capturing Kimberley than to the constant menace of its frustration which Lord Methuen brought to bear on the investing force. Throughout, the British General, while tactically on the strict defensive, holds the strategic initiative.

It is, then, to the position which Kimberley occupied in our defensive system during the first four months of the war that its siege, in itself less dramatic than that of Ladysmith, owes its importance.

Non-military considerations for various reasons played a larger part in the Cape Colony than in Natal; and nowhere was the influence of the political factor more visible than at Kimberley during the months that preceded hostilities. The better informed of its citizens had long made up their minds that if war broke out the Free Staters would make the town the first object of their attack; and as they had no thought of allowing the enemy free entry, they applied to Mr. Schreiner for arms and ammunition, and for leave to organise their defences. But

[1] See General Pole-Carew's reasons for believing that General Buller's scheme, after the arrival at the Modder, was impracticable. (Vol. ii., Question 16545, &c.)

the political and geographical relation of Kimberley to the Free State rendered secrecy of preparation almost impossible; and the Cape Premier, who to the very last clung to the hope of peace, was most unwilling to take any overt step that could be interpreted as minatory or hostile. When, therefore, on June 12th, the Mayor telegraphed to Capetown pointing out the defenceless condition of the town and begging that a consignment of arms and artillery, which had been stored at King Williamstown, should be forwarded without delay, Mr. Schreiner replied "that no reason whatever existed for the apprehension that Kimberley or any other part of this Colony either was, or in any contemplated event would be, in danger of attack," and "that it would be wrong on his part to seem to give colour or countenance to fears of invasion by the movement of arms and ammunition."

Ten weeks passed without anything being done to render the town defensible; but the situation grew steadily more critical, and on August 24th a deputation of citizens waited on the Mayor and once more, in view of the arming of the burghers and their openly expressed threats against Kimberley, urged that arms should be obtained and the defences organised. Again a temporising answer was returned to the effect that the Government was "fully alive to the importance of the defence of Kimberley in case need should arrive," an assurance which, so far as the Cape Government was concerned, never took a practical form; although with it, constitutionally regarded, rested the sole responsibility for the safety of the town.

While, however, Mr. Schreiner's fears were paralysing all defence preparations in Kimberley itself, the Imperial Government had made up its mind to lend a helping hand. To judge by the published documents, it appears that in so doing they were actuated less by the strategic reason mentioned above, namely, that Kimberley, if defended, might serve the purpose of diverting part of the enemy's forces, than by the consideration that the abandonment or fall of the town would have a bad effect in the extremely inflammable state of public opinion in the Colony. This in itself was a sufficient reason for defending it; and for over a year the necessity of so doing had been recognised by the military authorities. As early as April, 1897, the Colonial Office

had pointed out that the town was "in no position to resist attack"; and in the summer of 1898, Colonel Trotter, at the request of Sir Gordon Sprigg, drew up a report on its defences. On the strength of this report it was determined to rely chiefly on local volunteers, but to place "a thoroughly good imperial officer" in command, and to stiffen the civilian levies by a small nucleus of regular troops. Accordingly half a battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, the 23rd Company of Garrison Artillery, and one section of the 7th Field Company of Royal Engineers were sent up from the coast, and reached Kimberley on September 20th, 1899. A week before Lieut.-Colonel R. G. Kekewich,[1] appointed to command in Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, had also arrived, and with the assistance of Brevet-Major Turner, Captain O'Meara, and Lieutenant MacInnes, had commenced the organisation of the defences.

These last-named officers had been employed in Kimberley and the adjacent country for some weeks, and were well acquainted with the position of affairs on the western frontier. The Transvaalers were already out on commando along the Bechuanaland border; and although the Free Staters were less openly hostile, it was known that certain of them had determined to destroy the Orange and Modder bridges. Kimberley itself was full of spies, and the neighbourhood reeked of disloyalty. These facts would thoroughly have justified the immediate commencement of fortifications and the enrolment of volunteers: but Mr. Schreiner still shrank from any such step, and nothing was done until September 18th, when Captain MacInnes began the construction of the defence works, the general plan of which was based on Colonel Trotter's report.

[1] Colonel Kekewich was not sent up in the first instance to take formal command. His mission, which was strictly confidential, arose from the fact that Sir Alfred Milner was dissatisfied with the Commissioner of Police at Kimberley. Kekewich was to examine the state of affairs and to report if he did not think the town, frontier, and communications reasonably secure. He reported that everything was in an unsatisfactory condition, and was placed in command on September 20th. It should be added that the backwardness of the defence preparations was in no way due to the remissness of Commissioner Robinson, who had frequently insisted on the need of more men and more energy and, throughout the siege, proved himself a staunch and capable assistant of the commandant. (See Colonel Kekewich's Evidence, 21853.)

Roughly speaking, Colonel Kekewich's task may be divided into three portions: he had to watch the enemy's movements, to ensure the safety of Kimberley, and to do the best he could for the security of the long frontier placed under his command. As regards the first, all doubt as to the intentions of President Steyn were fast disappearing. As early as September 15th it had become necessary to protect the railway bridges south of Kimberley by means of small guards of Cape Police, which were placed there on the plea of preventing trespass. On the 18th the concentration of burghers opposite the Griqualand West frontier had so far developed that the possibility of a sudden attack obliged Colonel Kekewich to commence work on his more important defences without delay. Nine days later Captain O'Meara, who acted throughout as Intelligence Officer, went to Boshof and there witnessed a muster of Free Staters. Along the frontier as far as Mafeking all was as yet quiet, but it was evident that the small parties of Cape Police who were occupying the railway bridges and other important points would be utterly unable to hold their own when the invasion took place, and that any attempt to keep the enemy out of British territory could only end in loss and defeat. Colonel Kekewich therefore resolved when the proper moment should arrive to abandon the frontier and to concentrate all the scattered detachments in Kimberley.

Meanwhile, in spite of the delays imposed by Mr. Schreiner's hesitation, the proposed organisation of the local forces had been secretly completed. On September 30th Sir Alfred Milner authorised the enrolment of the Kimberley and Beaconsfield Town Guards for purposes of local defence.[1] It was upon the success of this measure that the possibility of defending the town depended, but at first the response of the citizens was far from enthusiastic; and it was probably due to the efforts of a few men, amongst whom Colonel David Harris was conspicuous, that it was realised in time that without the energetic support of the townspeople the Imperial troops would be unequal to their task. On October 2nd only 420 men had been enrolled; five days later the number had risen to 1,156, and by the end of the siege the total of men,

[1] An eight miles radius measured from the Market Square was the limit beyond which the Town Guards were not required to fight.

exclusive of regulars, Cape Police, and previously enrolled volunteers, who in one capacity or another took part in the defence, was over 2,500. Amongst them were a considerable number of refugees; but the bulk were Kimberley men, mainly employés of De Beers Mining Company. Some of these had been accustomed to use a rifle; the majority were in every sense of the word townspeople, and scarcely any had undergone a military training. The scheme of their organisation had been already framed by Major Scott Turner, who divided them into companies of a hundred men commanded by captains, the company being divided into four sections each in charge of a lieutenant. Sergeants of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment were told off to instruct them in the handling of their arms and teach them a few simple drill movements. For musketry practice there was little time or opportunity.

It was not, of course, intended that such loosely organised bodies should take part in the sorties and demonstrations on which Colonel Kekewich had from the first resolved to rely as his best means of defence. All that could be done was to allot to each company its place in the line of defence and to trust to the improvised works, the general openness of the ground, and a heavy, if erratic, shower of bullets to keep the Boers at a distance. It was hoped also that if it came to a serious encounter the men of Kimberley would show as much resolution as their equally ill-disciplined enemies. Although they had little enough fighting—only one Town Guardsman was hit during the whole of the siege—these civilian levies rendered three essential services. They made a surprise impossible, their presence prevented the enemy from ever risking an attack, and they set free the mounted troops and part of the regular infantry for more arduous and dangerous duties outside the lines of defence.

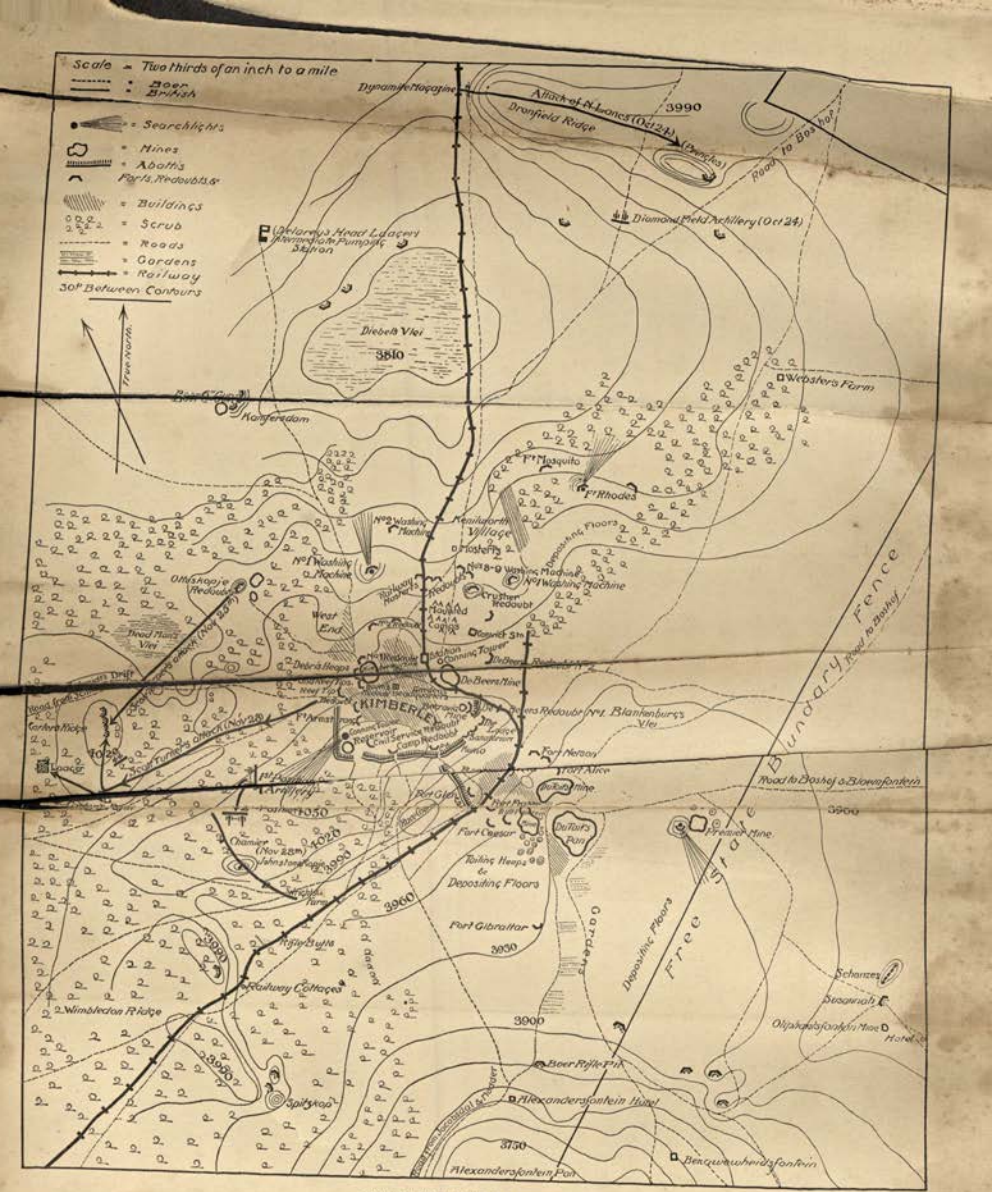
On October 4th Sir Alfred Milner called out the Kimberley Volunteer Regiment, the Diamond Fields Horse, and the Diamond Fields Artillery. The arrival of various bodies of Cape Police added 450 mounted men and officers to the garrison, and with them they brought two 7-pounder guns. A few days later Major Scott Turner was entrusted with the formation of the Kimberley Light Horse, of which Mr. Rhodes was made honorary colonel, and into the raising of which

he threw himself with characteristic energy. The original volunteer corps were augmented by recruiting; but the numbers of the mounted troops were limited by the supply of horses, most of these being supplied by De Beers Company from their stock at Macfarlane's Farm.[1]

[1] These were paid for after the siege by the Imperial Government. The following numbers and organisation of the Kimberley Garrison are mainly taken from the siege number of the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, corrected by the figures in Colonel Kekewich's despatch :—

	Strength.			Officers Commanding.
Regulars :—	Officers.	Men.	Guns.	
Half-battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment	9	413	—	Major W. H. E. Murray.
Detachment of Loyal North Lancashire Mounted Infantry ...	1	21	—	
23rd Company Royal Garrison Artillery	3	90	6 (7-prs.)	Major G. D. Chamier.
Section 7th Company Royal Engineers	1	50	—	Lieut. R. I. MacClintock.
Total of Regular Troops ...	14	574	6	
Volunteers :—				
Diamond Fields Artillery ...	5	108	6 (7-prs.)	Capt. S. May.
Diamond Fields Horse... ...	6	226	—	Major T. H. Rodger.
Kimberley Volunteer Regiment	22	473	—	Lt.-Col. R. A. Finlayson.
Remaining Maxims	—	—	6	
Total of Volunteers ...	33	807	12	
Local Levies :—				
Kimberley Town Guard ...	85	1,354	—	Lieut.-Col. D. Harris.
Beaconsfield Town Guard ...	17	341	—	Major J. R. Fraser (late Loyal N. Lancashire Regiment).
Kenilworth Defence Force ...	6	97	—	
Municipal Guard	6	193	—	
Permanent Guard[1]	5	164	—	
De Beers Maxim Battery ...	—	44	6 Maxims.	
Cyclist Corps	6	79	—	
Kimberley Light Horse ...	29	398	—	Lt.-Col. H. Scott-Turner.
Total ...	154	2,670	6	
Cape Police, Dismounted ...	4	119	—	Commissioner M. B. Robinson.
„ „ Mounted ...	18	337	2 (7-prs.)	
Total ...	22	456	2	
Grand total...	223	4,507	14	12 Maxims.

[1] Formed of refugees acting as substitutes for some of De Beers' employés who were required for work in the mines.



MAP OF THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY.

[Based on maps furnished by permission of the Directors of Military Intelligence.]

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After these arrangements had been completed Colonel Kekewich could dispose of between eight and nine hundred mounted, and perhaps 3,000 dismounted, riflemen.

Although for obvious reasons he would have wished for a stronger and more reliable mounted force, his main weakness was the want of modern artillery. The Diamond Field Artillery had indeed been re-armed by the guns from King Williamstown, which had been smuggled in, contrary to Mr. Schreiner's orders, but they were only 7-pounders, and totally unfitted to cope with the long-ranging ordnance of the enemy. Some 15-pounder field guns, belonging to the Prince Alfred's Own Cape Artillery, which were intended for Kimberley, reached Orange River too late. The armament of De Beers Maxim Battery had been purchased in 1895 in connection with the raid, and, together with 750,000 rounds of small arm ammunition and 750 rifles, had been taken over by the military authorities in the middle of September. The remainder of the arms and ammunition in Kimberley when the siege began were supplied by the Imperial Government. The town authorities did indeed open negotiations with dealers in the coast towns for the purchase of rifles and ammunition, but they were begun late; and so far as we have been able to discover no consignment had arrived when the Boers invested the town. Of 7-pounder shells there were 2,000 available; and the store was afterwards supplemented by the projectiles manufactured in De Beers' workshops.

The position which Colonel Kekewich had to defend,[1] although one of great extent, would not have been a difficult one to hold with a regular force adequately armed. The town of Kimberley lay on a rolling plateau, the highest point of which, marked by the Reservoir, overlooked all the surrounding country, with the exception of Wimbledon Ridge, some three-and-a-half miles to the south-west. Even this feature was not higher than the Reservoir plateau, whilst its range, nearly 6,000 yards, from the outermost point of the defences, was too great for the effective employment of field guns. From the Reservoir the ground sloped away southward towards Alexandersfontein Pan

[1] See map of Kimberley.

(six miles), and northwards towards Diebel's Vlei (five miles). Beyond the last-named hollow, but on the other side of the railway, long scrub-covered undulations rose again into the Dronfield Ridge (seven miles). The weakest side was towards the west, where the outskirts of the town were exposed to fire at rather over 5,000 yards from Carter's Ridge and from the underfeature of the Lazaretto 1,500 yards nearer. On the eastern side the plain stretched out flat and coverless towards the Free State. The inclinations throughout were very gentle, and the differences of altitude very slight, the greatest, that between the Reservoir and Alexandersfontein Pan, being only 300 feet, and most of them amounting to not more than 30 or 60. So far, however, as they affected the situation, Kimberley was favourably placed.

The town itself, measuring roughly about five miles in circumference, lay mainly on the northern incline of the Reservoir plateau, around the mines to which it owed its existence. Within its area were congregated all the principal buildings, the Town Hall in the centre, the railway station half a mile to the east, the Drill Hall in the Botanical Gardens about the same distance to the south-east, and the Hospital near the Drill Hall. Close to the point where the railway leaves the northern edge of the town was the gaol, and north of it De Beers' workshops. The Kimberley Mine lay 300 yards south-west of the Town Hall, the De Beers' Mine just north of the Botanical Gardens. The distance between these two mines, the narrowest diameter of the town, was just a mile; the longest diagonal, measured from north-west to south-east, was about two. Outside and inside the mass of dusty buildings the evidences of the diamond industry were everywhere apparent in the shape of machinery, tailing heaps, and the broad stretches used as depositing floors. Only in the village of Kenilworth, built by Mr. Rhodes for his employés about a mile to the north of the town, and in the gardens between Du Toit's Pan and Alexandersfontein was there any considerable mass of greenery.

From a military point of view a line of defence enclosing Kimberley only would have been the strongest and simplest; the inclusion of Beaconsfield in the system of defence greatly extended the area of the *enceinte* without conferring compensating advantages. This important

suburb which had grown up between the Bultfontein and Du Toit's Pan Mines and along the side of the Reservoir plateau, stretched in a disjointed strip of buildings, tailing heaps, and sheds to the southern extremity of Wesselton village, two miles south-east of the main town. Colonel Kekewich at first contemplated abandoning this ong and exposed offshoot; for the defences on the high ground by the Sanatorium and Fort Kumo would have made it impossible, or at any rate extremely difficult for the Boers to remain in Beaconsfield had they succeeded in effecting a lodgment. However, on the instance of a deputation, headed by the Mayor, the Commandant decided to modify his plans, and to erect forts to cover Beaconsfield from an attack from the south; and that the more willingly as it had already been determined, in view of the necessity of occupying Premier Mine, to connect that position with the main *enceinte* by a fort near the Bultfontein Mine and by another to the north of Beaconsfield itself.

The position of the works which were to guard this long and irregular front was largely determined by that of the tailing heaps which were scattered round it. Each of these great lumps of *débris* was in itself a natural defensive position with a wide field of fire; while its size and the material of which it was composed made it easily convertible into a redoubt. The necessary labour was available in the shape of the natives employed on the Diamond Fields; and the work must in many cases have been greatly facilitated by the employment of the local haulage machinery and by the personal direction of employés of the De Beers Company who were skilled in the construction of galleries and shafts. It only remained to decide which of the tailing heaps could most advantageously be occupied.

It was of essential importance that the enemy should be kept as far from the open town as possible, and consequently that the positions chosen should include as wide an area as was compatible with the strength of the garrison, the practicability of mutual support, and the possession of a good field of fire. In the main the defences of Kimberley satisfied these conditions. The names and disposition of the forts, redoubts, and barricades, with their garrisons, may here be briefly retailed, beginning at the Reservoir and taking the western,

northern, eastern, and southern fronts in succession. With a few exceptions the same line was held throughout the siege.

At the Reservoir, which formed the south-western angle of the defences, were placed two Garrison Artillery guns and one of the De Beers Maxims. The buildings and filter-beds to the northward were occupied by one or two companies of the Town Guard, and round the salient of wire fencing was erected a line of abattis composed of "cleared" mimosa bush interlaced with barbed wire. Three hundred yards from the filter-beds stood Fort Armstrong, held by about fifty Town Guardsmen, chiefly consisting of miners from Kamfersdam. The barricade on the Schmidt's Drift Road and the Reef Tip Redoubt were held by a hundred of the Permanent Guard, and in rear of these posts was Blum's Redoubt on the south-western edge of the Kimberley Mine. North-west of the Kimberley Mine lay No. 1 Redoubt, occupied by sixty of the Town Guard, immediately overlooking the barrier on the Barkly West Road.

The neighbouring block of corrugated iron buildings, known as the West End, was the weakest point of the defences, for it masked the fire of the forts in rear and afforded cover for an assaulting party. From a military point of view the buildings should have been removed. But here again other considerations intervened. This quarter was inhabited by the poorer Dutch, and such a drastic interference with their property might have given an appearance of vindictiveness which it was desirable to avoid. Moreover, it would have been necessary to rehouse the displaced population, and the town was already full. It was therefore decided to trust to the known weakness of the Boers in attack and to leave the buildings standing.

The West End was not the only weak point on this front. All the ground west of No. 1 and Blum's Redoubts and north of the Schmidt's Drift Road was strewn with a mass of *débris* heaps, offering cover sufficient to shelter entire battalions, to say nothing of Boer riflemen. The correct line of defence would naturally have encircled all this broken ground, as well as the outskirts of the West End, but in view of the smallness of the available force and the weakness inherent in too pronounced a salient it was decided to trust to the

fire from the two redoubts and from the shelter trenches connecting them to prevent the enemy from crossing the hollow road and getting a hold on the positions near the Kimberley Mine. A barbed wire fence was run along the *débris* heaps as far to the west of the road as could be commanded by fire from the redoubts;[1] and in order to strengthen the defences behind the West End another fence seven or eight feet high, and consisting of vertical strands of barbed wire, was erected to connect the Barkly West barrier with No. 2 Redoubt, which was held by the two Cape Police guns[2] and fifty Town Guardsmen.

It may not be uninteresting to consider for a moment what chances of success an attack upon the west front would have had. The first step would naturally have been to establish a strong artillery position on Carter's Ridge and thence to push out works towards the town, on a front which threatened the line of defence from the Reservoir to No. 2 Redoubt. The enemy might then have advanced, by means of regular siege approaches, to within 1,500–1,000 yards of the *enceinte*, being careful to demonstrate against some other point, preferably Kenilworth, at the same time. A simultaneous rush, or better, a vigorous feint against Kenilworth, in order first to distract the attention of the British reserves followed by a strong assault against the western front, might have resulted in the Boers obtaining a lodgment on the *débris* heaps in front of Blum's Redoubt. They might then have dug shelter trenches in the following night and brought up their guns. These would probably have made the line of redoubts untenable; and as the ground did not permit of the formation of a second line, a successful counter-attack could alone have saved the situation.

The same want of troops which made it impossible for Colonel Kekewich to enclose the *débris* heaps and the West End obliged him

[1] It should be remembered that abattis are not intended to afford any *cover* to a defending force. They are merely put up to act as obstacles which may delay the assailants at ranges known to the defenders. The first condition, therefore, of a successful abattis is that it should be within *range* and *sight* of the latter.

[2] Their range was about 2,000 yards.

to leave Ottoskopje and Kamfersdam unoccupied until towards the end of the siege,[1] and to fix the north-west angle of his line at Nos. 1 and 2 Washing Heaps of the Kimberley Mine, the former held by a section of Royal Engineers and provided with a searchlight, the latter, which was the most northern post west of the railway, by the Town Guard This was afterwards abandoned, and three works were thrown up between No. 1 Washing Machine and the Crusher Redoubt, on either side the railway and on the northern edge of the cleared Kaffir Location. They were known as Railway Redoubt, No. 1 Location Redoubt, and Mostert's Redoubt, the latter holding a company of the Town Guard. The Transvaal Road was also barricaded. Most of the inhabitants of Kenilworth village came into Kimberley; and, although later on Fort Mosquito and Fort Rhodes were erected on its north-western front and a searchlight set up on the latter, the main line of the defence throughout the siege ran south of its gardens and of the De Beers' Depositing Floors. Works were erected at No. 8 and 9 Washing Machine (120 Town Guardsmen) and No. 1 Washing Machine (80 Town Guardsmen and a Maxim), and were supported in second line by the Crusher Redoubt, which was armed by two Garrison Artillery guns and a Maxim. Another redoubt, raised on the big heap north of the Convict Station, formed the north-eastern angle of the defences. The eastern front, facing towards the flat country round Blankenburg's Vlei, was covered by a line of abattis and strengthened by redoubts Nos. 5, 6, and 7 and a searchlight. The point where the road and railway left the town east of the Botanical Gardens was barricaded, and was flanked to the south by the Belgravia Mine Fort held by 90 Town Guardsmen, and by the Lodge Redoubt. The line was then carried, independently of the suburbs, round the edge of the Reservoir Plateau by way of the Sanatorium, Fort Kumo, Camp Redoubt, and Civil Service Redoubt, this section being covered with abattis and connected with the defences of the Reservoir. The Sanatorium, where

[1] In February, Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil proposed that an attack, covered by the fire of the 6-inch gun at Kamfersdam, should be made upon Ottoskopje.

Mr. Rhodes resided, was garrisoned by some of the Kimberley volunteers and a few regulars with a Maxim; Fort Kumo, which consisted mainly of a garden wall arranged for defence, by Kimberley volunteers; the other works, including the barrier on the Boshof Road, by the Town Guard.

The Kimberley *enceinte*, eight miles in circumference, was therefore complete in itself and independent of the outlying positions. Beaconsfield was protected by two groups of forts north and south of the suburb on the Du Toit's Pan and Bultfontein tailing heaps, the former consisting of Forts Nelson and Alice, the latter of Forts Cæsar, Fraser, and Milner. The Race Course hollow, along which ran the railway, was commanded by Fort Glencoe, in front of which a cross abattis effectively closed the gap betwixt Kimberley and Beaconsfield. All the Beaconsfield forts were completely commanded from the high ground near the Sanatorium, and were held by sentries only, it being intended to move troops into them if the enemy attempted to surround the Premier Mine. Indeed, the line of attack from the Premier Mine and Beaconsfield or on either side of them was the very worst that the enemy could adopt. Exposed though it was to their fire, any attempt to seize those points would have equally exposed them to that of the defenders on the Reservoir Plateau, and even had they succeeded in maintaining themselves, the difficulties of an attack upon the Sanatorium position would have made ultimate success impossible.

The importance of the Premier Mine lay in its abundant supply of pure water. It had been recognised some months before the siege that, by cutting off the regular supply from the Vaal, the enemy could deprive the town of all but about three weeks' supply in the Reservoir, and a small and quite insufficient quantity in the town wells. If, therefore, the siege were to be prolonged, it was absolutely necessary that the water in the Premier Mine should be available, and it was to ensure this that a garrison of 400 men, including a company of the North Lancashire Regiment, and two Garrison Artillery guns were placed there, under the command of Captain O'Brien, and the position provisioned for independent defence. Strong in itself, it could have

been reinforced at need by sending the mounted troops across the Blankenburg Vlei flats.

Thus did Colonel Kekewich endeavour to make good the deficiency of reliable troops and modern artillery. With the exception of the west front, which has already been noticed, and certain points which in regular warfare would have been essential to the safety of the town and the same want of men made it impossible to hold, he succeeded. His small reserves, which consisted of two companies of North Lancashires, the Diamond Fields Artillery and the mounted troops were encamped, the last named near the gaol, the rest in the Botanical Gardens. His own headquarters were near the centre of the town, but he proposed to direct the defence from conning-towers over 100 feet high, one of which was erected near De Beers' Mine, the other at the Reservoir. These were in telephonic communication with every section of the works. By night the defence was greatly facilitated by four searchlights—"Rhodes's eyes" as the Boers called them—which had been originally erected to prevent diamond-stealing. Armoured trains were built, and all the available coal devoted to the working of the railway, the water-pumps, and the searchlights. The alarm signal early in the siege was three blasts from the hooters; later on, when the mines stopped working and the members of the Town Guard who were employed in them lived permanently in the redoubts, this method of calling them to duty was discontinued, much to the relief of the inhabitants. The removal of all the natives outside the *enceinte* to specially selected spots and the destruction of their huts wherever they interfered with the fire of the defenders completes the summary of the British preparations. By October 7th, thanks chiefly to the energy of the executive officers, Scott-Turner and MacInnes, they were so far complete that the town was safe against a *coup-de-main.*

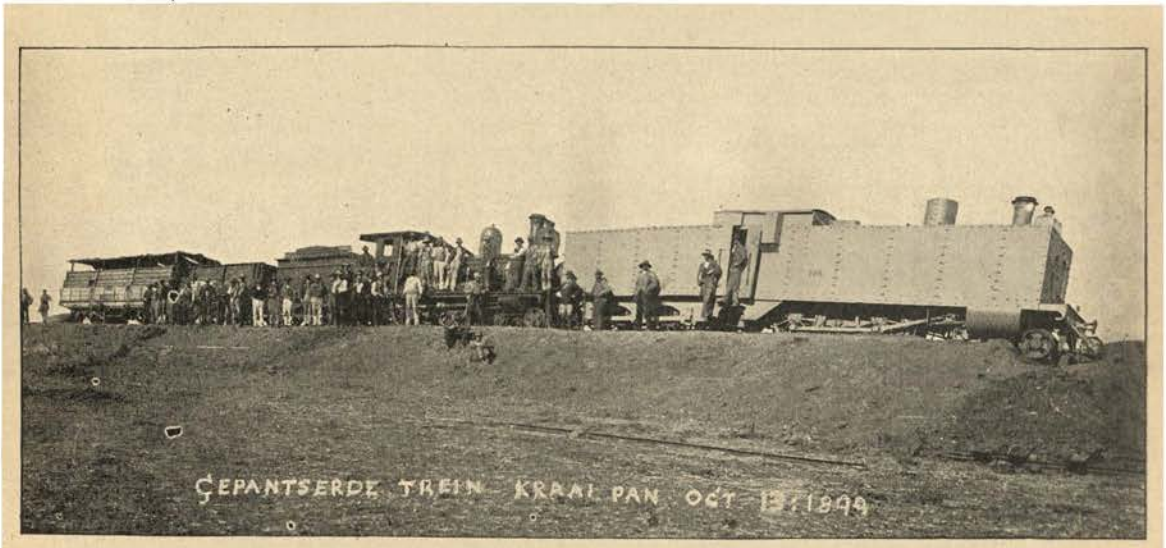
Next in importance to the question of protection came the problem of feeding the large miscellaneous population. It is the presence of this feature that differentiates the siege of Kimberley from those of other South African towns; and the administrative difficulties connected with it were destined to render the work of the commandant doubly arduous. At the beginning of October, though the fact

was not realised till two months afterwards, when the removal order necessitated a census, there were probably 43,000 people,[1] of all races and ages, within the lines of the defence. Of these over 3,000 were enrolled in the garrison; of the remainder, 21,000 were white or coloured residents and 19,000 were natives living in the compounds or locations on the outskirts of the town. Fortunately no one had been able to take exception to the collection of food or forage; and in these matters Kimberley had had a free hand. As a result a very large quantity of supplies of all kinds, amongst other items 7,000 tons of coal and 14,000 tons of wood, had been brought in mainly through the agency of De Beers Company, who, in addition to their diamond industry, drove an extensive retail trade with the surrounding districts. The new crops of mealies, a foodstuff which can be used by both men and animals, had just been secured; and stocks had been laid in by many private persons. Just before the war broke out Sir Alfred Milner's proclamation checking the export of all foodstuffs into the Boer republics, and the withdrawal of railway trucks to Kimberley in consequence of the cutting of the line between

[1] The exact numbers of the population will probably never be known. Colonel Kekewich estimates them at 48,000, including 30,000 coloured and 18,000 whites. At the beginning of the siege the total was understood to be 30,000 all told. This underestimate is partly, but only partly, accounted for by the fact that an insufficient allowance was made for the refugees who had poured into the town from Barkly West, Windsorton, and other places in the neighbourhood. The final census, taken on February 22, 1900, a week after the town was relieved, gave a total of 45,951, including a garrison of 4,146. This estimate, however, includes, besides residents who took part in the siege, a brigade of Lord Methuen's troops, a number of whites who had come in from the surrounding districts, a good many natives who were out of reach of the census collectors of the preceding December, and the wounded left behind by French's column and other detritus from Lord Roberts's army. On the other hand, the total of 35,971 exclusive of garrison, shown by the "removal census" of December, is certainly too low. The unpopularity of the project may have caused some people successfully to shirk the enumeration; and others in the hurry of the moment may easily have been overlooked. Making allowance for the incompleteness of the December estimate and for over 1,000 deaths which occurred between the end of November and the date of the relief, and adding 4,500 to include garrison, staff of municipality, and certain persons connected with the mining industry who were exempted from the removal order, it will probably not be wrong to say that on an average some 42,000 people had to be fed and housed during the investment.

it and Mafeking brought additional supplies into the town, while the 2,600 oxen belonging to De Beers and other owners, and those beasts which it was possible from time to time to drive in, provided a sufficiency of fresh meat for a considerable part of the siege. A rough estimate of the available food had been taken in September; and on October 15th the supply lists were checked, and a proclamation was issued limiting prices. A fortnight later Colonel Kekewich was able to report definitely that he had 70 days' meat and bread, and 42 days' forage in hand.

Meanwhile events outside Kimberley moved fast. On October 4th Boer forces advanced to Koedoesdam, within twelve miles of the town,



ARMOURED TRAIN WRECKED AT KRAAIPAN.

and the cutting of wire fences towards Benauwheidsfontein indicated a movement towards Spytfontein. The alarm on the following day was a false one purposely sounded to test the working of the Town Guard system; but the enemy were now near enough to strike, and contemporaneous accounts bear witness to the completeness of the trial by their belief in the reality of the danger. The next five days passed quietly; but on the 10th Colonel Kekewich agreed to the withdrawal of the police at Kraaipan to Mafeking, a measure which was purely a matter of arrangement between himself and Colonel Baden-Powell, for the police force were not put under his orders until two days after the

declaration of war. Fortunately this tardiness, which throws a curious sidelight on the attitude of the Cape Government, had no bad results.

On the night of the 12th a party of burghers, in the hope of attacking the police, crossed the frontier at Kraaipan, and broke the line. Next day Lieutenant Nesbitt's armoured train was stopped, and after a fight which continued throughout the following night, was forced to surrender by the Boer artillery. On the 14th the enemy crossed the frontier of Griqualand West, and at 9 p.m. all telegraphic communication with the north ceased. About two hours later all the wires south of Kimberley were also broken, and the town had henceforth to rely on messengers alone. Next morning the enemy were found in position on the hills beyond Spytfontein Station; and Colonel Kekewich forthwith proclaimed Martial Law in Kimberley.

Meanwhile the police at Taungs were falling back on Fourteen Streams in order to join the detachment holding the bridge and with it to withdraw to Kimberley. But on the evening of the 15th the river post was suddenly abandoned; and the police there, who were largely composed of Dutchmen, "crumpled up and retired,"[1] leaving the party from Taungs to shift for itself. The same afternoon the police at Vryburg began their march southwards. The volunteer corps of that village, who were nearly all rebels, dispersed in the evening; and Commissioner Scott, broken-hearted at the behaviour of his men, shot himself. By the morning of the 16th all the Cape Police were in full retreat; and the frontier of Griqualand West was left absolutely without defence. Only at Kuruman, nearly 100 miles from the frontier, was the slightest attempt at resistance made. Here Commissioner Bates, supported by a few police and by about 100 of the citizens was besieged by about 400 rebels, and after a very gallant resistance lasting until the new year, was forced to surrender. The rest of the police reached Kimberley in safety, the last to come in being the Vryburg detachment, which arrived on the evening of October 23rd. For the wise and courageous disregard of the appeals for protection that reached him from various quarters,

[1] Colonel Kekewich's evidence, 21869.

notably from Barkly West,[1] and for the prompt concentration of all the available forces at Kimberley, Colonel Kekewich deserves much credit.

The defenceless state of the colony was at once taken advantage of by the enemy; small bodies of whom spent the latter part of October in riding about demanding the surrender of undefended towns and villages. "In some instances the Government officers, members of the Cape Police, and even unoffending traders, . . . were made prisoners; . . . all Government property was seized and much private property commandeered . . .,"[2] Bechuanaland was declared a province of the Transvaal, Griqualand West a province of the Orange Free State; and with the issue of a counter proclamation ended, as was bound to end, Kekewich's control of the region of which he was nominally commandant.

The enemy closed in on Kimberley with characteristic deliberation. On the 18th shots had been exchanged with a reconnoitring party near the Intermediate Pumping Station north of the town, but during the first fortnight of hostilities little else occurred worthy of mention outside the circle of defence. The enemy devoted themselves to looting cattle; Colonel Kekewich contented himself with an occasional reconnaissance with the armoured train and with the completion of his preparations. This additional respite was an obvious blunder on the part of the assailants; but so many examples of this kind of inactivity are forthcoming in the history of the war that one ceases to wonder at them, and is obliged to regard them as inherent in the Boer system. Not till October 24th was there any serious fighting, and this was entirely due to a chance encounter.

On the morning of that day a reconnoitring party consisting of part of the Cape Police and a strong detachment of the mounted troops under Scott-Turner left Kimberley at daybreak and marched northward with the object of ascertaining the position and strength of a body of the enemy reported in that direction. An armoured train

[1] 120 Martini-Henry rifles, and 20,000 rounds of ammunition were brought in from Barkly West on October 20th.

[2] Colonel Kekewich's despatch.

WESTERN EXTREMITY OF THE DRONFIELD RIDGE.

under Lieutenant Webster was held in readiness to support them. How loose was the investment at that period is shown by the fact that Scott-Turner found Dronfield Siding and the ground on either side of it unoccupied. The armoured train came up and held the point reached by the horsemen, while they pushed on to Macfarlane's Farm. Still no enemy was visible, and at 8.30 a.m. Turner, leaving part of his force to hold the farm, advanced with the remainder on Riverton Road Station and the Waterworks.[1]

He had not gone far when a body of Boers were sighted by the look-out at the farm. This commando was under the orders of Commandant Petrus Botha, and had been directed by Wessels to drive off the live stock from Kenilworth village. It was soon apparent that the enemy intended to turn the British right; their numbers continually increased in the hollows east of Scott-Turner's position, and although the latter threw out a line to confront them and sent the armoured train to try and seize some stores known to be on the line two miles to the northward, the screen had ere long to be reinforced and the train recalled. At 10.15 a.m. Scott-Turner heliographed to Kekewich that he intended to withdraw to Dronfield, and asked that artillery should be sent to support him in case of need. The Commandant, who had foreseen the possible need of reinforcements, at once despatched two guns and two Maxims with an escort of mounted police; and these troops were soon followed by a train carrying two companies of the North Lancashires under Lieut.-Colonel Murray.

Meanwhile long-range firing had become general; and as the enemy still threatened the British right, Scott-Turner withdrew his troops to the ridges south of Macfarlane's. A little later he sent 125 men to the south of Dronfield to meet the guns, which were advancing so as to bear on the flank of the enemy's attack. Soon after midday it began to develop, a large party hurrying south towards Pringle's Ridge, which formed the eastern end of the Dronfield Hill. Colonel Murray, whose train was now close to Macfarlane's, saw the movement and steamed back to Dronfield, Scott-Turner following in the same direction. The North Lancashires came up only just in time

[1] See map of the Siege of Kimberley.

to save the guns. Proceeding along the road running west of Pringle's Ridge, the artillery escort had failed to discover the enemy, who allowed it to pass unmolested and then opened fire on the gunners which were following. The situation was a sufficiently trying one for volunteers, but, under the courageous leadership of Captain May, they managed to bring their guns into action and commenced a vigorous reply. But the combat was an unequal one. The escort exhausted their ammunition without bringing the Boer fire under, and Scott-Turner's men, who were also moving on Pringle's Ridge from the opposite side, stumbled on some Boers behind the wall of a dry dam and became entangled in a heavy fight at close quarters. A thick mist, which concealed everything south of Dronfield from Scott-Turner's view, added to the uncertainty of the situation, although the fire in that direction showed that the guns had come into action and were keeping open the line of retreat.

It was at this juncture that Colonel Murray passed Dronfield and heard the sound of the firing. Realising the position, he halted and detrained his men; and having deployed under cover of the embankment, advanced eastward along the ridge occupied by the enemy. In spite of a sharp fire and the loss of two lieutenants, who were wounded, the Boers were driven off the ridge; and the guns, which had already been obliged to fall back before the enemy's sharpshooters, were enabled to retire in safety. Out of eighteen men and twenty-six horses, four men and twelve horses had been killed and wounded.

The flight of the Boers from Pringle's Ridge left the way open for the withdrawal of Scott-Turner, and the whole force returned to Kimberley without further molestation. Small as the skirmish was, its moral effect was most important. It was the first time that the besiegers had tried the mettle of the besieged, and the experience was not to their liking. Commandant Botha with several of his men had been killed; and the rest, with all the advantages of ground, numbers[1] and position, had been beaten off. So unwarlike was the enemy's temper at that period that there is good reason to believe that

[1] Estimated at 800.

something resembling a panic took place that night amongst the scattered bands to the north of the town. In Kimberley the satisfaction was unbounded. In so loosely organised a force the moral barometer was very sensitive, and the need of a first success had been keenly felt.[1]

Next day the enemy began to tighten his line of investment on the south of the town. Redoubts began to be visible near Alexandersfontein Pan; and on the 28th Scott-Turner, reconnoitring from Premier Mine, drew a considerable fire from Oliphantsfontein. On the north, however, the Boers remained massed about the Intermediate Pumping Station in expectation of another attack; and the end of the month found them still inactive.

But the early days of November witnessed a change in the demeanour of the besiegers. On the 1st the dynamite of De Beers Company, which had been removed from Kimberley to Dronfield before the siege began, was blown up. On the 3rd two determined efforts were made to drive off live stock from Kenilworth and from the western front. The attempt on the former failed in face of the mounted troops and the artillery, but later in the day a good many cattle, which had been allowed to stray too far, were captured by Boers from Carter's Ridge. All the available mounted men were employed to meet this second raid, and there was a good deal of firing. This was the first time that the enemy had brought artillery into action on the northern front, and their operations showed an energy which is possibly ascribable to the presence of Delarey. The worst loss incurred by the defenders during the day was the capture of the sanitation mules, a misfortune that entailed the reorganisation of the sanitary system of the town.

Next morning Chief Commandant Wessels summoned Kimberley to surrender. The main importance of this document, to which Colonel Kekewich returned the answer that the Boer leader should capture the town "by an operation of war," lies in the additional proposition, that

[1] Our losses were three killed and nineteen wounded, amongst the latter two officers of the Loyal North Lancashires and Lieutenant McClintock of the Royal Engineers. In view of the paucity of trained soldiers in Kimberley the loss of these officers was very unfortunate.

in case of refusal to capitulate, all women and children should be removed to some spot out of danger; and further, that Wessels was prepared "to receive all Africander families who may desire to leave Kimberley and also to grant freedom and safety to all women and children of other nations who may leave the town." After consultation with the leading civilians, Colonel Kekewich resolved to publish only the offer to Africanders, whom alone Wessels had promised to "receive" and of whom it was desirable to have as few in the town as possible. It was held that the notification of the other offers was not advisable, as they were only likely to alarm the population, and their conditions made them impracticable or unacceptable to the people. Quite apart from the questions of sanitation and supply, there was no convenient spot for a women's laager; and so far as the offer to allow women and children to leave Kimberley was concerned there was no guarantee that they would be maintained or cared for when they reached the lines of the besiegers. Seeing that only five persons availed themselves of the offer to Africanders, it is hardly likely, apart from sentimental reasons, that many Englishwomen and children would have run the risk of accepting the far more unfavourable proposal made to them. The matter is worthy of mention, for when at the end of November the entire contents of Wessels' despatch became known, many people, uneasy at the outlook of affairs, blamed Colonel Kekewich for not having given them the opportunity of withdrawing, an opportunity which it may be safely said no one a month earlier would have considered for an instant.

The desirability, however, of lessening the number of mouths to be fed turned the attention of the authorities to the natives. It was hoped that if they were sent out in small batches the Boers might be willing to let them through, whether with the desire of remaining on good terms with their tribes or of employing them in digging. But this policy received a check at the outset, for on the night of November 6th Mr. Rhodes, apparently on his own initiative, sent out a body of 3,000 from the Wesselton compound; the Boers naturally refused to receive them, and in the morning, to the surprise of every one, they were observed 1,500 yards from Kenilworth. At first they were mis-

taken for Boers, and the Crusher Redoubt guns actually opened fire on them before the mistake was discovered. Mr. Rhodes's action must be strongly condemned: for not only was it certain to fail in its object, but it carried with it the danger that the enemy might attempt a rush under cover of the throng of natives. Many of these people were never collected again in their compounds, and were a source of anxiety throughout the siege. Fortunately the behaviour of the blacks, especially that of the Zulus and Matabele, was generally excellent.[1]

By the 6th of November the enemy had made good their positions round the town, and on the evening of that day fired two shells from the Wimbledon Ridge. Next day was marked by the commencement of the cannonade which passed by the name of the First Bombardment. Three field guns opened fire from the Wimbledon Ridge against the Reservoir and Sanatorium, and another shelled Premier Mine, but the ranges were extreme and no harm was done. On the 8th the enemy were seen to be working at artillery emplacements on Carter's Ridge, the Wimbledon guns were silent, and during the three following days not a shot was fired. It was evident that fresh positions were being prepared on the north as well as on the east and west; and a good deal of uneasiness was felt in the town. Probably it was to calm these fears that on the 10th the erection of Fort Rhodes was commenced.[2] Early on the 11th the bombardment recommenced. By this time the enemy had at least six guns in position, one south of Beaconsfield, three west of the Lazaretto, one at Kamfersdam, and one on the slopes south-east of Dronfield Siding. With these they shelled the whole circuit of the defences and the town with considerable vigour, but the ranges were too great for effective fire, and only one casualty resulted from the cannonade, a Kaffir woman being killed. As at Ladysmith, the Boer artillerymen made no attempt to concentrate their fire against any one point, and threw more shells into the open town than the defences. On

[1] Towards the end of December a certain number penetrated the lines of investment. Some were detained by the enemy for work on their redoubts, while others were taken to Johannesburg. But the diminution of the population by these means was quite unappreciable.

[2] The telegram calling for relief seems to have been despatched a week earlier.

the 11th they fired 400 rounds, all of them segment shell, for the range was too long for shrapnel. This rapid expenditure of ammunition may help to account for the fact that during the following days the bombardment slackened, and that between the 13th and 28th of November, after which there occurred a week of silence, fewer shells were thrown into Kimberley than on the first day alone.

The material results of this bombardment were inappreciable. Probably the enemy hoped to create a panic amongst the inhabitants. Nothing of the kind occurred, not even when the fire was at its hottest, and time had not proved its ineffectiveness. All classes bore the ordeal with coolness and courage, and after the first few days learnt to treat the cannonade with equanimity, if not with indifference. At the commencement many of the Kenilworth people came into the town and were housed in any buildings which chanced to be vacant; but the discomfort of their new quarters seems to have been greater than that inflicted by the shells, for not a few returned to their homes.

Colonel Kekewich, prevented by the short range of his guns, and his limited store of shell,[1] from making more than a formal reply, did what he could to harass the enemy, and by frequent reconnaissances and feints to divert his attention from the town. True to the policy "of always keeping the enemy on the move and constantly in fear of attack from an unexpected quarter," the indefatigable Scott-Turner sallied forth and in the skirmishes of the 11th, 16th, and 17th gave at least as good as he got. When the news of Methuen's advance reached the Boers they had the dissatisfaction of knowing that they had wasted their best opportunities, and that the only result of a month of small encounters and shell-fire had been to harden and encourage the defenders.

On November 21st large bodies of the enemy were seen moving southwards, a sure sign that the relief movement had begun, and on the 23rd a cypher message from Lord Methuen announced that he would arrive on the 26th.[2] No further information arriving, Colonel

[1] De Beers had not at that time begun to manufacture ammunition.

[2] A curious specimen of the official Boer despatch was published on the same day, to the effect that a "night signal" from Methuen had been intercepted, and that its contents were as follows: "1,500 men lost in the battle of Belmont. Keep good courage, we are coming."

Kekewich determined on a vigorous demonstration in order to occupy the attention of the enemy and prevent their moving to oppose the Relief Column. Nothing seems to have been known of the line of route the latter would follow—such information, indeed, Lord Methuen could not give until he was within reach of the Modder and knew the dispositions of his opponent—but the Staff of the garrison was well acquainted with the country round Kimberley, and it was generally believed that the final advance would be by Jacobsdal. It was doubtless on this account that the Commandant resolved to demonstrate on the opposite side of the town, so as to draw the besiegers from the decisive point.

The operation was designed to take place along the whole of the western and south-western fronts. The extreme left was to be covered by the armoured train under Lieutenant Webster, which was to advance southwards towards Wimbledon Siding, the line in its rear being protected by a hundred of the Beaconsfield Town Guard at Wright's Farm. In the centre Major Chamier with four guns of the Diamond Fields Artillery, two Maxims with an escort of Cape Police, two companies of the North Lancashires and one of the Kimberley Volunteers, was to threaten the Boer positions on Johnstone's Kopje and the Wimbledon Ridge. Meanwhile on the right Scott-Turner, with 350 mounted men, was to occupy Otto's Kopje Mine, Lieutenant McClintock following with his Engineers and a Maxim, and holding that position so as to cover Turner's right rear against attacks from the Boer laagers at Kamfersdam and the Intermediate Pumping Station. Otto's Kopje having been secured, the mounted troops were to push on towards Carter's Ridge, and if possible drive the enemy from his artillery positions. Detachments of the Kimberley Town Guard were to take up positions on Barkly West Road and on the north front in order to cover the flanks and rear of the attacking troops.

At daybreak on the 25th Chamier debouched from the barriers and pushed on towards Johnstone's Kopje, his infantry deploying for attack as they advanced. The armoured train, after demonstrating to the north of Kimberley in the hope of drawing the Boers away from

the Pumping Station, ran back through the town and steamed towards the Wimbledon Ridge. Shortly before 5 a.m. the Diamond Fields Artillery opened fire on Johnstone's Kopje as a signal to Scott-Turner, who soon after reached and occupied Otto's Kopje Mine. Then with scarcely a halt he made a dash at the Lazaretto and completely surprised the enemy, whose main body was some distance away. A picket of six men were caught asleep and a series of rocky ridges occupied, from the summit of which the enemy could be seen hastily preparing for action in their laager. At this moment a heavy fire was suddenly opened from some works on the high ground beyond; and without hesitation Scott-Turner led seventy men of the Kimberley Light Horse and Cape Police to the attack. The men followed their daring leader gallantly, and entered the redoubts at the point of the bayonet, taking thirty-three wounded and unwounded prisoners and driving away the remainder. By half-past five this part of the short fight was over, and Scott-Turner, lining the crest he had won, poured a heavy fire into the laager some 800 yards further back. The enemy, however, were now on the alert, and began to be reinforced from the direction of Kamfersdam.

Meanwhile, in the centre, Chamier's infantry were firing volleys at Johnstone's Kopje; and his artillery were engaging Boer guns near the Railway Cottage and Spitzkop, a spur of the Wimbledon Ridge. The armoured train was at Wright's Farm. Whether anything further could be done depended on Scott-Turner, who for an hour and a half held to the ground he had won in front of the Lazaretto in spite of the increasing numbers of his opponents and his rapidly decreasing supply of ammunition. Had he been supported there seems no reason why he should not have maintained himself and made Carter's Ridge the base of further offensive movements. But it was too hazy to signal for assistance, and when at 7 a.m. his right flank was seriously threatened, he resolved to fall back. The retirement was carried out in perfect order, Chamier sending two guns to the Lazaretto to cover the movement. By 8 a.m., the mounted troops being in safety, the rest received orders to withdraw; and two hours later the whole force was back in Kimberley, bringing with them Scott-Turner's prisoners and

a quantity of arms he had found in the captured works. The British losses amounted to seven killed and twenty-nine wounded, the last category including Scott-Turner himself, who was grazed by a bullet in the shoulder, and three officers. Those of the Boers, according to their own estimate, were eleven killed and eighteen wounded, besides prisoners.[1] In his despatch Delarey confessed frankly that he had sustained a reverse. He animadverts severely upon the carelessness and neglect of duty which led to the surprise, and estimates the number of those burghers who actually took part in the fighting at 400, including reinforcements.

The morning's work had been highly creditable to the mounted troops, who had lost heavily in their attack on the redoubts, and testified to the confidence that their leader inspired. Unfortunately it was his last victorious expedition. On the evening of the 27th a searchlight message satisfied Colonel Kekewich that Lord Methuen was close to the Modder. At the same time the movement of the enemy southwards became more pronounced. The laagers at Spytfontein and Spitzkop were reported vacated, and everything pointed to a strong concentration to oppose the Relief Column. The Commandant therefore resolved on another demonstration to the west of the town, and issued his orders on the same evening.

The general plan was much the same as that carried out on the 25th, but the number of troops to be employed was much larger, and the operation was intended to take place in broad daylight, so as to render the diversion more effective. The armoured train was to play the same part as before, but was to be accompanied by 300 of the Kimberley and Beaconsfield Town Guard. The centre column was to consist of three companies of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, three of the Kimberley Volunteers, and over 100 mounted men, as well as the Royal Engineers, four Maxims, and the entire battery of Diamond Fields Artillery. Scott-Turner's column, on the right, was over 600 strong; so that, exclusive of the artillery, fully 1,800 troops were to be employed. Otto's Kopje was

[1] These figures are probably correct. The British estimate of the Boer losses was eleven killed and fifty wounded.

confided to a detachment of the Kimberley Town Guard. It was intended that the entire force should be commanded by Major Chamier, but owing to some misunderstanding that officer remained under the impression that, as in the preceding sortie, he was only to command the column of the centre.

The centre and left, as before, was to occupy the enemy's attention, this time seizing Johnstone's Kopje and holding the ground between that point and Wright's Farm. Major Scott-Turner, issuing by the Schmidt's Drift Road, was to advance on the Lazaretto and Carter's Ridge. The Engineers were to help to fortify the positions seized by the mounted troops, and these were further to be supported by artillery in case it was necessary to shell the enemy out of the redoubts which they had re-occupied. From their dispositions and the strength of the force employed it would appear that Colonel Kekewich was not without hope that the enemy might have been so weakened by detachments to the Modder as to be unable to prevent him from permanently occupying Carter's Ridge and Spitzkop. Still the movement was intended primarily as a feint; and the attack of the redoubts was to be preceded by a thorough artillery preparation.

At 3 p.m. on the 28th the troops left the barriers, and the infantry, deploying for attack, advanced against Johnstone's Kopje, which the Boers almost immediately abandoned. Half an hour later the kopje and the ridge connecting it with Wright's Farm was occupied, and the infantry began exchanging shots with Boers at the Railway Cottage. About 4 p.m. the Diamond Fields Battery, which had been in action against Boers near Carter's Farm, turned its fire against two guns at Spitzkop, the Royal Garrison Artillery guns at the Reservoir shelling the four redoubts west of the Lazaretto. The enemy, however, paid no attention to this fire, and fixing their attention on Scott-Turner's column, shelled it as it advanced. Our dispositions must have been clearly visible; and there is good reason to think that the Boers, penetrating the intentions of the British commander, reinforced their left on Carter's Ridge.

Meanwhile Scott-Turner had reached and occupied Carter's Farm. He at once made his preparations for the attack of the position,

extending part of his force on the ridge north of the farm and pushing a squadron towards the Lazaretto to cover his right. With part of a company of the Loyal North Lancashires sent to him by Chamier he reinforced his line on the ridge; the rest, with a few Sappers, he placed at the farm, where he also left a squadron of the Cape Police to guard the horses of the attacking troops. Facing almost due north, his front was exactly at right angles with the line of redoubts and about 500 yards from the southernmost. The enemy's guns shelled the troops at Carter's Farm with vigour, and the rifle-fire soon became very heavy. Noticing this, Chamier detached Major Peakman with 100 mounted men and two guns to Turner's support; but before they had arrived the latter had advanced and, in spite of a sharp fire, had cleared the southernmost redoubt. Here for a moment's breathing-space he halted, and signalled for guns to help him to clear the ridge. The guns were already on their way, and a few minutes after he had called for them, came into action to the north of Carter's Farm, plying the principal redoubt with shrapnel at 1,000 yards range, while Peakman's squadron joined Turner's firing-line. Turning to the left, the Diamond Fields Horse destroyed the laager west of Carter's Ridge; and although the enemy attempted a counter attack on the Farm, they were driven off by two Maxims and Major Snow's squadron of Cape Police. The flanks, therefore, were still clear. All depended on the capture of the redoubts.

Scott-Turner waited for about half an hour for the artillery preparation to take effect, and then, as the guns failed to subdue the Boer fire, he determined on a direct attack. With rare courage and endurance he and about seventy men advanced and in a few minutes entered the second and third of the series of redoubts, both of which appear to have been unoccupied. The main fort, a strong loop-holed work provided with head-cover, still loomed ahead, separated from that in which Scott-Turner lay by about sixty yards of open ground. The fire, which had been growing more and more deadly, now became intense. Aiming from loopholes, the enemy made it impossible for any one to show themselves over the breastwork without being hit. Man after man was struck down, nearly all shot through

the head, amongst them their gallant leader, who had scarcely raised himself to fire his revolver when he sank back lifeless with a bullet in the brain. Lieutenant Clifford rose to his feet and ordered the men to fix bayonets and charge. A dozen responded to the call, but their officer fell wounded, and few of those who tried to cross the open returned alive. Major Peakman, with fourteen men, ten of whom were soon hit, now reached the survivors, and seeing how desperate was the situation, asked for reinforcements. This message seems to have reached Major Chamier too late. At 7 p.m. the firing died away. The light was failing, and Colonel Kekewich, who had been anxiously watching the fight from the Reservoir Conning-tower and had actually observed the capture of the first two works, could not in the gathering darkness be sure whether the main redoubt had been taken. He remained at the look-out station till long after dusk, expecting every moment to get a report of the result; and at last, concluding that it had been favourable, ordered the troops to hold the positions they had secured. Not till nearly 10 p.m. did he receive the news of the failure of the attack; and in response to a message from Peakman describing the position, directed him to take command of the mounted troops and to withdraw under cover of darkness. In the small hours of the following morning he learnt that portions of mounted troops and the two guns of the Diamond Fields Artillery had returned to Kimberley, and that the Lazaretto and Carter's Farm had been abandoned. Chamier was ordered to provide for the safety of his uncovered right, and to withdraw to Kimberley, which he did without molestation on the following morning.

So ended the last important operation undertaken by the Kimberley garrison. The defeat of the Relief Column at Magersfontein a fortnight later rendered further demonstrations purposeless, and the irreparable loss of his best officer must have increased Colonel Kekewich's unwillingness to undertake any operation which was not absolutely necessary. The principal cause of the failure was obviously the committal of the principal task to so small a body of men. Out of a body of over 600 Scott-Turner only succeeded in bringing about

100 to the attack of the Boer fort: a fact which is accounted for by the diversion of a part of the force towards the enemy's laager, the need of covering the flanks and rear and that tendency to dispersion and loss of cohesion which is one of the characteristics of modern fighting. There seems some ground for the criticism that after Major Chamier had decided not to press his attack against Wimbledon he failed to bestow close enough attention on what was transpiring on his right, and to support Scott-Turner as strongly as he might have done. As it was, four of his guns and all his infantry, with the exception of one company Loyal North Lancashire and the Engineers, played a game of long bowls with the enemy on the Wimbledon positions, while the decisive action was occurring two miles away. No doubt the misunderstanding above mentioned lessened the chances of efficient co-operation.

Our losses amounted to twenty-two killed, including Scott-Turner and Lieutenant Wright, two officers and twenty-six men wounded. Thirteen of these casualties occurred in the Cape Police, eleven in the Diamond Fields Horse, and twenty in the Kimberley Light Horse.[1] The high proportion of killed, together with the great number of wounds found on them, gave rise to suspicions of foul play, but these facts seem sufficiently accounted for by the enemy's explanation that they did not know whether many of our men lying in the open were wounded or not, and so continued firing at them. Of the gallantry displayed by the little band of volunteers there is no question; their self-devotion could not have been surpassed by regular troops, and eloquently testified to the ascendency which their lamented leader had gained over them.

We shall pass rapidly over the military events occurring between the sortie of November 28th and the second bombardment of January. The Boers, no doubt largely owing to Methuen's presence on the Modder, showed no increase of energy; and the British confined themselves to occasional sorties with the mounted troops under Major Peakman, a worthy successor of Scott-Turner, most of which had as

[1] The Boer despatches give their losses at three killed and two wounded, figures which, in view of the excellent cover provided by the sandbagged fort, are probably not far from the truth.

their object the driving in of cattle. About the 21st of December Otto's Kopje and Davis's Heap were occupied; the one to prevent the enemy using it as an artillery position and to facilitate cattle raiding and outside communication, the other to protect the natives when they went to work in the vegetable gardens south of Wesselton. About the same time, too, the Boers having almost entirely deserted Carter's Ridge for other positions, Colonel Kekewich had the wells at the farm destroyed. These measures, together with occasional attempts to raid cattle, were the only signs of activity on the side of the besieged. The besiegers, beyond occasionally throwing a few shells into the town, showed none at all. The matters of chief importance at this period of the siege concerned Kimberley more as a town than as a fortress. Early in December the receipt of General Buller's orders for the removal of the population roused great indignation. As the result of a meeting of the town officials at which Colonel Kekewich explained the intentions of the military, protests were signalled to the camp on the Modder for transmission to Capetown. After Magersfontein the matter naturally dropped, but the friction between the civil and military elements was increased by this difference, especially at a time when the depression caused by British defeats, the prolongation of the siege, the augmented hardships and the want of news combined to create a feeling of irritation against everything "military," and made the position of Colonel Kekewich anything but easy.

The question of supply now inevitably assumed the first place. At the beginning of the siege it was calculated that there were in the town three months' supplies. At first Colonel Kekewich contented himself with fixing the daily meat ration at one pound for adults; that of the garrison was somewhat larger. But other regulations soon became necessary. On November 1st a Supply Committee, presided over by Major Gorle, A.S.C., was formed; and it was ordered that bread should henceforth contain three parts meal to one flour. On November 4th a fresh Committee of Supply was instituted, and from that time the use of breadstuffs was carefully regulated. On November 13th all complete parcels of flour, meal samp, mealie meal, rice, and sugar were taken over and placed in six depôts; a staff of clerks to superintend their

management was formed; and a limited amount, based on the average weekly sale of the different merchants, issued to each. The demand was checked by the most reliable estimates of the population that could be obtained. The amount of the ration throughout was calculated on the assumption that there were 50,000 people to be fed, and was of course altered as the progress of events pointed to the shortening or prolongation of the siege.[1]

The cannonade of Magersfontein had been both seen and heard, but, as in the case of Colenso, no warning of the intended attack had been sent to the garrison and no assistance demanded. The confident expectation of a British victory was rudely shaken by a Boer heliogram, "We have smashed up your column," an announcement which seemed to be confirmed by Lord Methuen's silence. Not till four days after the battle did a message arrive ordering Colonel Kekewich to make arrangements to hold out till the end of February. The magnitude of the reverse only became known on December 17th, when some newspapers containing accounts of the fight reached Kimberley. The information afforded by the removal census was now most valuable. Arrangements for a stricter system of supply-issue were at once begun. Every applicant had to make a declaration to the clerks of his own ward stating the exact amount in his private store and the number of persons under his roof. All falsifications were heavily penalised, and by the help of the census figures could be easily detected. Permits to purchase food were then issued at the Town Hall. These were collected by the retail dealers, and presented to the Secretary of the Supply Committee, who wrote an order on one of the depôts for the issue to each retail dealer of the exact amount of food granted by the permits which he presented. No retail dealer was allowed supplies from the depôt unless he could produce Town Hall permits; and as by the end of December all the supplies in the town, with the exception of meat and what remained in the stores of private individuals, was in the depôts, the consumption could be accurately checked and controlled. The stores

[1] During November and most of December the grocery ration for adults was 1 lb. bread, 2 oz. sugar, ½ oz. coffee, ¼ oz. tea, and 2 oz. rice. No estimate appears to have been made of private stores until the latter part of the siege.

taken over at different times by the Supply Committees amounted to nearly 1,400 tons.

For the natives and Asiatics in the locations a different system of supply was adopted. Each household was registered, the numbers being further checked by the police, and furnished once a week with a ticket allowing them to purchase food from a depôt set up in each location. The native ration consisted of 4 oz. mealie meal, 4 oz. samp, 4 oz. Kaffir corn and the ordinary groceries as supplied to whites and coloured colonials.

There remained the difficult question of the meat supply. On December 6th, probably owing to the capture of stock by Boer raiding parties,[1] the ration had been reduced from 1 lb. to ½ lb. per adult, and a cold storage, designed by Mr. Labram, the brilliant American engineer of De Beers Company, had been erected at the suggestion of Colonel Kekewich. It was intended to kill the cattle before want of forage made them thin. The actual management of the business was not taken over by the military until January 3rd, when the same system was adopted as in the case of breadstuffs and groceries. By this time the supply was greatly diminished; the amount of preserved meat had originally been small; all the available mutton had been set apart for the hospitals, and it was imperatively necessary to find some other resource.

It was resolved to kill some of the horses. This was done all the more readily because the supply of forage was now running low. At the commencement of the siege there was available a large quantity of mealies and oats, but very little oat hay. A ration of 10 lbs. hay and 10 lbs. oats was allowed during October; but on November 10th a reduction was ordered, and on December 8th forage was reserved for military animals and for those of a few civilians, including the doctors. By the end of January even these animals were living mainly on mealies.[2] From that time to the end of the siege about six hundred horses were slaughtered and eaten. Those which survived, thanks to a careful

[1] On November 8th Delarey stated that 600 cattle, 200 horses, and 100 donkeys had been taken. Possibly this includes all the stock seized since the commencement of the siege.

[2] Ration on January 18th, 6 lbs. mealies, 4 lbs. chaff.

management of their diet, surprised the Relief Column by their plumpness and condition, and provided with a certain number of remounts the demobilised squadrons of the Cavalry Division.

By the middle of January every important article of diet was becoming scarce. Bread had long been reduced to a 10 oz. ration, meat to ¼ lb. Rice was no longer to be had, and all luxuries were kept for the sick. Worst of all was the want of vegetables, a need only partially made good by Mr. Rhodes' soup-kitchen, to which were sent the vegetables grown in Kenilworth and south of Wesselton. This kitchen, which was managed by Mr. Tyson and a staff of assistants, was very popular. Towards the end of the siege thousands of pints were issued daily, applicants receiving the soup in exchange for their ration of meat. All this required fresh organisation and fresh permits, the brunt of the work falling on the shoulders of the small detachment of the Army Service Corps and a few reliable helpers.

The increasing want of food and fuel, the overcrowding of the town, the long confinement and the mental strain was now telling on the health of the population. Typhoid and dysentery, of which there was a good deal towards the close of the investment, were not the worst evils. The terrible rise of the rate of mortality was due mainly to the want of two things, milk and vegetables. The first was responsible for the increase of infantile mortality, the second for the outbreak of scurvy. Speaking roughly, the average rate of mortality was trebled. It was impossible, even early in the siege, to procure sufficient quantities of fresh milk; for most of the farms which were accustomed to supply the town were in the hands of the Boers. Of tinned milk there was a very inadequate quantity; and of this a large part had been consumed before the authorities took the matter in hand. Not till January 14th was an appeal issued asking all those who were strong to give up using milk, Colonel Kekewich having decided that it would be better to proceed thus than to commandeer. The reply was fairly satisfactory, and by dint of a sparing issue from the military stores many of the worst cases could be given one tin a week; but the demand far exceeded the supply, and to the end of the investment the want could never be made good. The difficulty was unquestionably increased

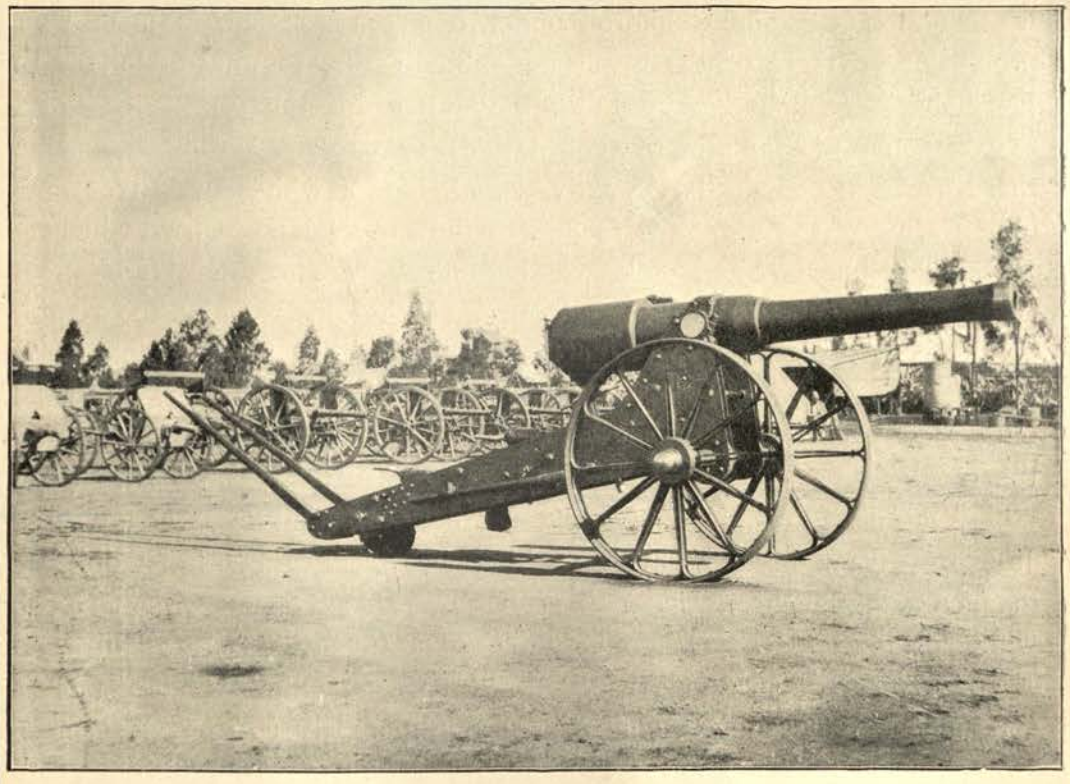
by the untrustworthiness of some of the local doctors. Many of these men did their work faithfully and well, but there is no doubt that some gave certificates for milk and others medical comforts to people who were not entitled to them. At the end of January a committee was appointed to inquire into the permit system, but it was then just one month too late. During the four months of November, December, January, and February there died in Kimberley and its suburbs 134 white and 433 coloured children under five years of age;[1] the greater proportion of these deaths being undoubtedly due to want of milk. In December the infantile mortality amounted in the case of whites to 671·1 per thousand, in that of natives to 912·7. During the siege there occurred 966 deaths of natives, and 161 of whites over five years old.[2] Most of the former were due to the outbreak of scurvy, which in December, January, and February became very virulent. Here again the want of proper food was the cause of the disease and the reason for its continuance. All sorts of experiments, including a drink made from vine-shoots, were tried, but the mischief could not be combated until the end of the siege brought an adequate supply of vegetables into the town.

We must now return to our record of the military events. On January 8th, the same day on which President Steyn's exhortatory manifesto to the Free Staters was published, the enemy recommenced work on Carter's Ridge. On the 10th shelling began again from Kamfersdam, Wimbledon, Alexandersfontein, and Oliphant's Kopje, and continued intermittently for the next fortnight, nearly two hundred shells being thrown into the town, with as little result as before. The 19th of January is memorable as the day on which "Long Cecil," the gun manufactured by De Beers' workmen under the direction of Mr. Labram, first opened fire. As early as November 12th the manufacture of shell for the seven-pounders had commenced; and the pressing

[1] *Gazette.* The report of the Medical Officer for Kimberley and Beaconsfield gives 117 white and 248 coloured. Possibly some of the outlying native settlements were not included in this estimate. Many of the native children no doubt died of scurvy.

[2] *Gazette.* The Medical Officer's Report shows 134 deaths of whites, 715 of natives. See last footnote, which helps to explain the discrepancy in the case of the natives.

need of long-range ordnance led to many consultations between the Staff and the engineers as to the possibility of making a gun. Not till December 26th was it finally decided that an attempt should be made, but the rare skill, amounting to genius, displayed by Labram and the energy of his subordinates overcame every difficulty, and in less than a month the famous gun threw its first shell into Kamfersdam,



"LONG CECIL."

a distance of eight thousand yards, considerably surprising the enemy and scattering the miscellaneous inhabitants of their laager in every direction. The projectiles were either ringed or common shells, and weighed twenty-nine pounds; the bore of the gun was 4·1″. From January 21st until the end of the siege it fired 255 shells, and proved of very real moral and material value to the town.

On January 24th the bombardment again began in earnest. The

Boers brought nine field guns into action on their old positions,[1] and raked every portion of the town, causing many of the inhabitants to build underground shelters. In two days they fired six hundred rounds, but effected nothing beyond damaging many buildings and killing and wounding six persons. Amongst these were a mother and two children, all cruelly mangled by one shell. Then, with the same suddenness with which they had begun the enemy desisted, and during the last six days of January no serious firing took place. On the 1st of February the Boer artillery opened again, and went on firing spasmodically till the end of the investment. It was calculated that in all the enemy fired 3,500 shells, as against 1,005 of the defenders; the casualties resulting from the bombardment probably did not amount to twelve.

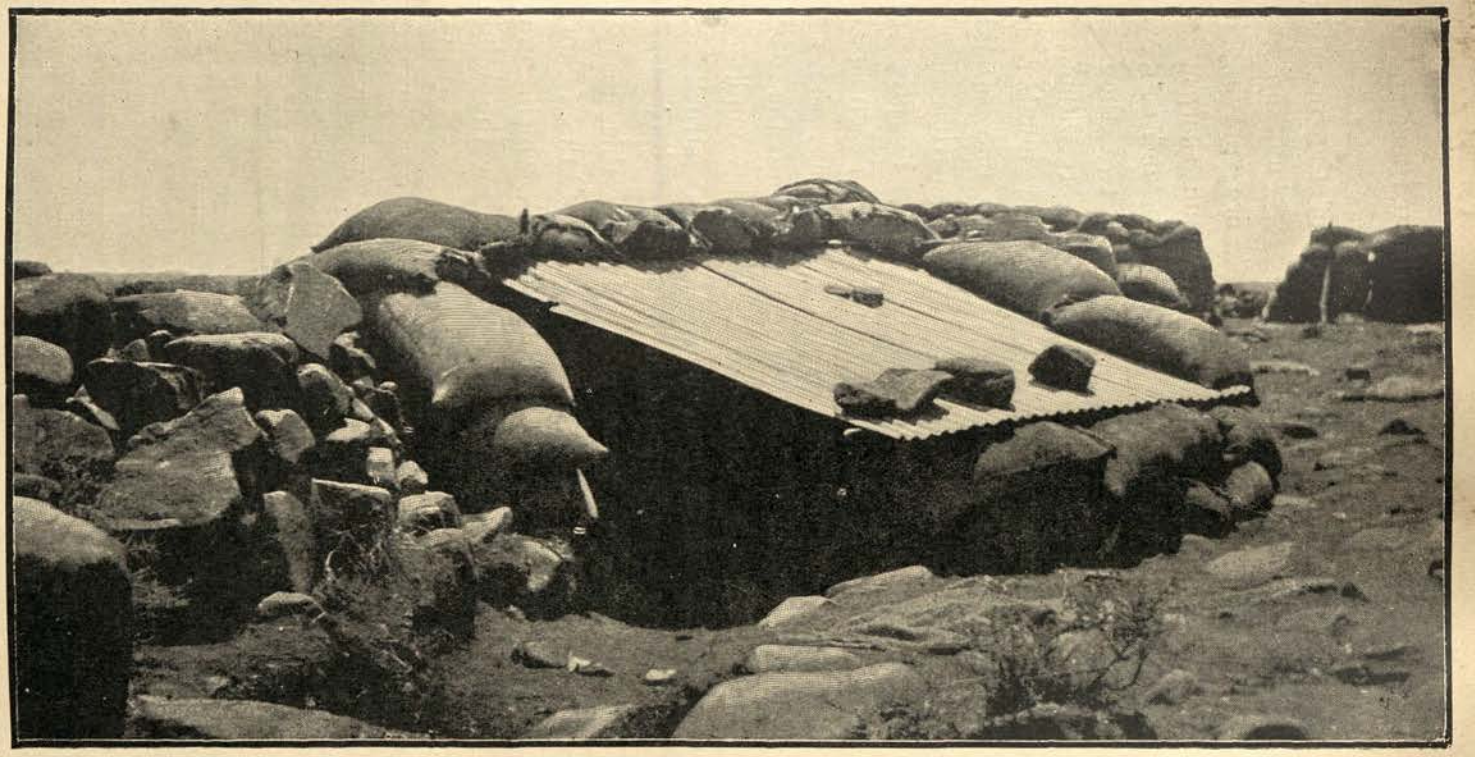
But a new factor was soon to come into play. On February 7th the inhabitants were startled by a much louder report, followed by the roar and crash of a six-inch shell. One of the "Long Toms" had been sent down from Pretoria, and placed in position at Kamfersdam.[2] For the first time the bombardment seemed likely to create a panic. The destruction of human life caused by the six-inch was scarcely greater than that effected by the field guns, but the size of the missiles, the rushing sound of their flight, and the frightful evidences of their power when they struck gave rise to a feeling of profound dismay. Equally demoralising was the uncertainty as to the time of firing and the direction of the shells. They were thrown into every part of Kimberley; and it was thought that the gun was laid on the different points by means of a large scale map. In great alarm men recommenced work on the underground shelters, or retreated to the cover of the mining heaps, where they were out of reach of the terrible projectiles.

It may be asked whether a system of shelters sufficient to protect the whole or a part of the population could have been erected earlier

[1] According to De Villebois-Mareuil, one of the reasons why the Boers did not move in closer on the west side of the town was want of water, partly due, no doubt, to the already mentioned destruction of the wells.

[2] De Villebois-Mareuil had been examining positions for the gun for over a fortnight before it appeared. It was the same gun which had been partially destroyed on Gun Hill, outside Ladysmith.

There was certainly a good deal of labour obtainable; indeed, one of the features of the siege were the relief works started by Mr. Rhodes as a means of livelihood for the numerous unemployed. But the preparation for any considerable number of people of only splinter-proof shelters is a matter of weeks, even if thousands of workmen and sufficient material are close at hand; and in the case of Kimberley the wood and iron necessary for such extended works was not to be had. Any such attempt, therefore, could only have had a very partial success, and in the last resort the *débris* heaps would have been the only cover available for the greater part of the population. There were other reasons why no provision of the kind was made. Neither Colonel Kekewich nor any one else foresaw the possibility of heavy artillery being brought to Kimberley; nor was it until the second bombardment that the inhabitants themselves seem to have felt the want of artificial protection. No doubt, also, the commandant was unwilling to alarm them by large preparations of the kind at the beginning of the siege; indeed, he probably felt it to be more a matter for individual choice than general action. The task of keeping a large mixed population quiet was one of the very greatest, if not actually the greatest, difficulty that he had to confront, and he may well have shrunk from a measure of the necessity of which he was himself not strongly convinced, and which was likely to arouse a good deal of annoyance and apprehension. Moreover, it was certainly desirable, for the sake of the general *morale*, that the people of Kimberley should face the bombardment so long as it was reasonably possible to do so. Throughout the siege the general behaviour had been excellent and but for the arrival of the six-inch would no doubt have remained so to the end. The very courage shown by them was a further reason against the use of artificial cover, for the question, after all, was as purely a moral one as any question can be which arises out of the possibility of the loss of human life. All this was true; but nevertheless it remains an open question whether, rather for the sake of a moral safeguard in the last resort than of a material protection, more probably would not have been gained than lost by devoting the available labour to the provision, whether in private dwellings or gardens, or in



BULLET-PROOF SHELTER AT KIMBERLEY

the waste spaces of the mining areas, of such limited means of protection as the local resources allowed.

However this may be, the bombardment of the open town was beginning to show its effectiveness as a military measure, and could no longer be disregarded. "Long Cecil's" fire proving ineffectual against the solid emplacement of the 6″, some sharpshooters were pushed forward during the night of the 7th–8th, and at dawn opened a heavy fire on the redoubt at a range of two thousand yards. Throughout the day they kept it up, and not without effect for several of the gunners were hit; amongst the number being M. Léon, the French engineer, who had acted as one of the Transvaal advisers on matters of gunnery. But the rifle fire did not silence the 6″, which did considerable damage to property, set a store on fire, and killed and wounded half a dozen people. On the 9th the shelling recommenced with fresh vigour, the small guns laying on our defences, the 6″ on the town. During the day it fired seventy-four shells, killing a mother and child and wounding two men of the reserve. Worst of all, Labram himself was struck by the last shot fired, which wrecked the room in which he was dressing and killed him instantly. The depression caused by this loss was very great, and was not diminished by the events of the following day. Many people were now retreating to Beaconsfield, which, owing to its position, was not visible from Kamfersdam; and on the mining heaps in this district not a few found a temporary refuge. In the evening of Saturday Labram's funeral took place. The procession had scarcely started when the silence of the night was broken by a renewal of the bombardment. It was the first time that the big gun had fired during the hours of darkness; and the demoralisation probably reached its climax when it was realised that the enemy had seized this sinister occasion to pour their shot upon the mourning town. The firing continued until near midnight; and although no one had been hit, many persons spent the remainder of the night in wandering about the streets or cowering behind the *débris* and culverts and under railway arches.

This state of affairs could not be prolonged indefinitely, and in the morning Mr. Rhodes determined to carry out an idea which had

already been mooted, and to offer the women and children a refuge in the mines. The next day, being Sunday, was, as usual, marked by a cessation of the artillery fire; and the brief respite was employed in lowering large numbers of the population down to the galleries and tunnels which ran 1,200 feet below the surface of the ground. By midnight 2,600 women and children were huddled together in these strange shelters under the glare of the electric light. Arrangements were made for the supply of food, and all that was possible was done to ensure the comfort of the unfortunates, but had the siege long continued want of proper sanitary arrangements and the inevitable crowding must have seriously prejudiced their health, and necessitated their return to the upper air. The measure was a desperate one, adopted in a hurry and without sufficient preparation; but at the time it certainly had a good effect, and helped to check the nervous paralysis that was fast gaining ground.

Happily the sufferings of the population were nearly at an end. The bombardment continued, though with less violence, during the 12th and 13th; several houses being set on fire and five persons injured by the fall of a chimney struck by a shell. But it was now generally known that Lord Roberts had commenced operations for the relief of the town. The enemy's laagers began to show signs of uneasiness, and during the day their telegraph-poles were moved to the west of the town, in order to ensure uninterrupted communication with Spytfontein in case the Jacobsdal line was cut. On the afternoon of the 13th smoke was seen rising from Klip Drift in unwonted volume; and next morning news reached Premier Mine that in the preceding night a Boer despatch-rider had galloped into Alexandersfontein on a horse covered with foam, and had reported French's arrival on the Modder. In consequence of this news the positions of the investing force south of Kimberley had been abandoned. Major Fraser, on receiving the intelligence acted with boldness and promptitude. With a portion of the Beaconsfield Town Guard he advanced on the abandoned works, taking four [1] prisoners and

[1] Three of these were Boer despatch riders, who, arriving one after another, were inveigled into the hands of the detachment by Private Adamson, an Englishman, who had previously been sent on commando.

inflicting several casualties, amongst which unfortunately was numbered a Dutch girl, who was wounded. Four waggon loads of supplies, a few horses and cattle, were also captured and sent into Kimberley. As the enemy threatened an attack on the captured position, a hundred of the North Lancashires with two guns and some mounted troops were sent out in support; and with the help of these reinforcements, though heavily shelled throughout the day from Wimbledon Ridge and from the east of Alexandersfontein, Fraser held his ground.

Next morning the big gun opened fire as usual; but at 11 a.m. it suddenly ceased. At first it was supposed that a shot from "Long Cecil" had damaged it, and the real reason did not appear until, at 2.30 p.m., there appeared in the direction of Du Toit's Pan a large body of horsemen. Not long afterwards a heliogram announced that they were British troops, and by 5 p.m. the advanced scouts of French's division entered Kimberley.

So ended successfully Kekewich's long and arduous task. Compared as a military achievement with the defence of Ladysmith the siege of Kimberley was uneventful; and it had nothing of the picturesqueness which isolation and apparent weakness lend to the story of Mafeking. The Boers never appeared so contemptible as at Kimberley. And yet their want of energy must certainly in part be ascribed to the soundness of the defensive system of their opponents. The Commandant shares with Baden-Powell the credit of having from the first realised the weaknesses of the enemy as a military force. With few reliable officers and troops he contrived so to play upon the fears of the Boers that during four months they never came within 3,000 yards of the defences;[1] and it is not too much to say that throughout the siege the assailants remained on the defensive.

Only towards the end did the enemy find the weak point of the defence. This lay, as it had lain throughout, in the presence of

[1] One of the reasons of this was their dread of mines. A few had been laid down at the commencement of the siege, and were industriously talked about. The effect of this measure was heightened when one of them was exploded by lightning during a thunderstorm.

the large civilian population. It is this factor that marks off the siege of Kimberley from that of other South African towns, and by the persistency with which it forces itself on the observer almost makes him forget the nearness of the enemy. We have already said something of the internal administration; enough, we think, to have shown how multifarious and difficult were the questions that constantly arose and how hardly they must have pressed upon the small Staff and its civil coadjutors. Their solution was not rendered easier by the character of the population and the fact that most of the men whose families were affected were in the ranks of the garrison. On several occasions, notably in the question of the defences of Beaconsfield, the Commandant chose a course opposed to what was strictly speaking the sound military policy in deference to civilian representations. In the matter of food supply, for instance, much waste might have been avoided if from the first he had commandeered all public and private supplies. In our opinion, especially when it is remembered that at the time an early relief was confidently expected, he was right in abstaining from so harsh a measure; but in any case his policy in these matters is a good example of the limitations under which he had to work. Although commandant of the garrison, he had always to remember that he was not in the same position as the governor of a fortress,[1] that the population regarded the siege as a matter which concerned themselves first, and the requirements of the "military situation," which they did not understand, and against appeal to which they were always inveighing, afterwards. Praiseworthy as their general attitude unquestionably was, it was inevitable between two parties representing such divergent points of view that friction should arise; and on the whole, far less allowance was made by the civilians for the difficulties of the military than by the military for the hardships of the civilians.

These differences naturally reached their climax in the friction which took place between Colonel Kekewich and Mr. Rhodes. We

[1] Though readers may be reminded that hard-pressed fortresses have often fallen through the pressure put on the military authorities by the civil population. This danger was one of the main causes of the abandonment of the fortress system in the eighteenth century.

have no desire to minimise the services of the latter, his high courage, his generosity to individuals, and his resource at certain crises, shown in his employment of the surplus white labour in road-making, his dedication of the produce of his extensive gardens to the use of the population, and his offer of the shelter of the mines to the women and children. But it would be very far from the truth to say that his influence was always equally beneficial. His presence might, indeed, enormously have facilitated the Commandant's task, for in Kimberley his will was supreme, and his authority, honestly based upon the sincere admiration of the residents and his own great powers, was practically unquestioned. Had he thrown himself upon the side of the military authorities, consented to sink his own personality and to entrust himself in matters on which he was not competent to give an opinion to their guidance, Colonel Kekewich's hands would have been greatly strengthened, and the world would have heard little of complaints against the military.[1] Such a part, we frankly admit, it would have been hard for one so self-confident and so conscious of his own capacity to play. We do not think that we are unjust to Mr. Rhodes's memory in concluding that when at some personal risk he entered Kimberley in October, he contemplated playing a considerable part in the defence of the town he had made so famous; and we can understand his harbouring no small feeling of irritation, as time went on, at the inadequacy of the armament with which it had been provided, and the general unpreparedness of the defences of Cape Colony—blunders with which the Staff in Kimberley had had nothing to do. But when in October, in opposition to the views and wishes of Kekewich, he began appealing for help, his judgment was not only completely at fault, but his action was calculated to increase the alienation which was already existing between the military and civil elements and to weaken the resisting power of the town. From this time relations seem to have grown more and more strained, until in the

[1] See Colonel Kekewich's evidence given before the Royal Commission. Referring to Sir Redvers Buller's evidence, Sir Henry Norman asked (question 22029): "Mr. Rhodes is not alluded to here; it says, 'the leading civilians'? (Col. Kekewich.) That is Mr. Rhodes; the leading civilians were really nobody in this matter."

last days of the siege the friction culminated in Mr. Rhodes's message to Lord Roberts. If we may accept the account given of the former's attitude in an article which appeared in the London *Daily Telegraph*,[1] it would seem that he was possessed with the idea that Kimberley was about to be abandoned to its fate in favour of some other strategic plan. Even if this had been the case—and we shall see later that a movement to the relief of Kimberley was not the only operation that offered chances of success—it was certainly Mr. Rhodes's duty to do nothing that might hamper the action of the British army or alarm the minds of the inhabitants at a moment when they were seriously affected by the terrors of the bombardment. But instead of taking the saner and broader view, he called together the Mayor and a few of the leading citizens and in concert with them drew up a document which he forwarded to Colonel Kekewich with the request that he should transmit it by heliograph to the higher military authorities. The Commandant sent a summary of the message, which reached Lord Roberts the day before his army began its march. The most important parts of the document were as follows :—

"Kimberley, February 10th. On behalf of the inhabitants of this town we respectfully desire to be informed whether there is an intention on your part to make an immediate effort for our relief. Your troops have been for more than two months within a distance of little over twenty miles from Kimberley, and if the Spytfontein Hills are too strong for them there is an easy approach over a level flat. . . ." After describing the hardships of the town as a justification for the sending of the request, the message concludes: "We understand large reinforcements have recently arrived in Capetown, and we feel sure that your men at Modder River have at the outside 10,000 Boers opposed to them. You must be the judge as to what number of British troops would be required to deal with this body of men, but it is absolutely necessary that relief should be afforded to this place."

In what terms Colonel Kekewich's summary was framed is not known, though it was definitely stated by Lord Roberts later on in a

[1] March 26, 1900. This article, like most others which appeared at the time, was strongly biassed in favour of Mr. Rhodes.

letter to the Mayor that it contained no mention or suggestion of surrender,[1] but if, as there is no reason to doubt, it accurately reflected the tenor of the original, it is not wonderful that the Field-Marshal concluded that it amounted to a deliberate threat to surrender unless a relief force was set in motion immediately, and that he based his reply upon that assumption.[2] It may be that Mr. Rhodes, although himself determined to resist to the last, believed that the bombardment had brought the defence within measurable distance of collapse. The accuracy of such a view of the situation has been contested, and justly; but it is only on the ground of such a belief that his appeal can be justified.

It has frequently been maintained that the cause of these unfortunate differences was the tactlessness of Colonel Kekewich. It was unavoidable that in some instances military restrictions should press hardly on the population; but that does not prove that they were superfluous. So far as Mr. Rhodes was concerned reliable evidence is still to seek. A contemporaneous article complained that the Commandant treated him like a simple civilian. We venture to assert, on the contrary, that on all material questions his advice was demanded, and that all important information was imparted to him as soon as it arrived. And we may reasonably ask, From which party was most forbearance fairly to be expected?—from the overworked soldier carrying a heavy load of responsibility or the experienced politician, strong in the consciousness of his influence over those whom he represented?

[1] Colonel Kekewich confirms this (22030), and states further, that in his opinion Mr. Rhodes never wished to surrender (22031). But Sir Redvers Buller, Sir Alfred Milner, and Lord Roberts, all agreed in interpreting Mr. Rhodes's messages in an opposite sense; and the action of the soldiers was strongly influenced by their belief in the reality of the danger. For these outcries there was, as Colonel Kekewich explained, no military reason whatever (see Questions 22032–7).

[2] The published text of Lord Roberts's reply was as follows: "I beg you represent to the Mayor and Mr. Rhodes as strongly as you possibly can the disastrous and humiliating effect of surrender after so prolonged and glorious a defence. Many days cannot possibly pass before Kimberley will be relieved, as we commence active operations to-morrow. Future military operations depend in a large measure on your maintaining your position a very short time longer." He added that, as martial law had been proclaimed, Colonel Kekewich had full power to prohibit, by force if necessary, any public meeting he considered undesirable, and also to arrest any individual, no matter how high his position, who acted in a manner prejudicial to national interests. (Lord Roberts's evidence, 10843.)

We have no desire to linger over these regrettable episodes, the discussion of which to some extent involves the character of one who is no longer able to answer for himself, and has written his name indelibly in the history of the development of the British Empire in South Africa. But the presence of so powerful a personality was bound to influence the march of events; and no account of the siege of Kimberley would be complete without a reference to Mr. Rhodes's share in that important episode of the war. It is much to be deplored that the last great occasion which brought him conspicuously before the eyes of the public should have found him in a besieged city; of all places the one least suited to the exercise of his restless and masterful genius.

CHAPTER XI

EVENTS ON MODDER RIVER DECEMBER TO JANUARY

POSITION OF AFFAIRS ON THE MODDER—PILCHER'S EXPEDITION TO SUNNYSIDE—RECONNAISSANCES SOUTH OF THE MODDER—ATTITUDE OF CRONJE—LORD ROBERTS'S MILITARY POLICY—CHOICE OF OBJECTIVE—COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES OF THE VARIOUS LINES OF ROUTE—SPECIAL ADVANTAGES OF A MARCH ON KIMBERLEY—REORGANISATION OF TRANSPORT—RAILWAY ADMINISTRATION—NEWS FROM NATAL—LORD ROBERTS REACHES THE MODDER.

WHILE the Boers were besieging Kimberley, Methuen and his opponents lay motionless in the positions they had held on the evening of Magersfontein. At the commencement of the war there was no general to whom the Boers looked with more pride and confidence than Cronje. Hard, narrow, unscrupulous, domineering, resolute, a violent hater of the English, he was the natural leader of the extreme war-party, and, when hostilities broke out, was undoubtedly more popular than Joubert himself. He had some experience of war, and according to report was the only one of the Boer commanders who had studied the deeds and writings of the great captains. But his obstinate and unelastic mind, satisfied with the success of Magersfontein and too ready to despise the intelligence and resolution of the enemy he had defeated, seems to have been dominated by the idea of covering the blockade of Kimberley. His plan of campaign after Lord Methuen's repulse remained the same as before. To prevent the English from relieving the town constituted his entire strategy. His failure to deliver a counter attack while his opponent was still shaken by his defeat may perhaps be explained by the fact of his men's exhaustion, but his refusal to adopt the suggestion of Delarey and De Wet, and raid the British communications, is unpardonable. The result of his inactivity was

that, as at Stormberg, a victorious force with every local advantage on its side remained for two months motionless in front of its beaten antagonist, whose troops consisted almost entirely of infantry, and depended for their supplies upon one long and exposed line of rail.

North of the Modder there was practically no fighting, unless the daily exchange of shells from the heavy guns or the chance encounter of patrols be so regarded. On their part the Boers strengthened their entrenchments along the base of the kopjes, and extended their left until it rested on the river near Brown's Drift; measures dictated more by the fear of a fresh attack than by any thought of assuming the offensive. On the British side the time was spent in fortifying the camp and organising the defence of the railway. It has been questioned whether Lord Methuen might not have adopted the tactics of French at Colesberg, lengthened his line, seized Jacobsdal, and threatened Cronje's flank; and General Buller, in two messages despatched on December 16th and December 23rd, actually proposed that this should be done by a lateral extension of the railway. But the suggestion was scarcely made when Lord Roberts arrived and directed the forces at Modder River to maintain a strict defensive.[1] Whether during the preceding weeks more could profitably have been done is open to question. All the arguments which were in force against an outflanking operation at the end of November gathered double weight from the moral and material losses of Magersfontein; and the 5th Division being diverted to Natal, no reinforcements were available. Any movement upon Jacobsdal would certainly have led to serious fighting, which, in view of Methuen's want of mounted troops, could scarcely have resulted satisfactorily. Indeed, during the days following the battle, men's thoughts turned rather to retreat than advance. At the time there was some anxiety lest Methuen should be isolated; his provisions were increased to sixty days, and he kept the whole of his mules at Modder River in case he should be suddenly obliged to move. Even the unambitious policy of keeping Cronje in position and preventing him from reinforcing other parts of the theatre

[1] January 12, 1900. Lord Methuen had informed the authorities at Capetown that with another division he could turn Cronje's position.

of war aroused the apprehension of the High Commissioner; and it was primarily due to the insistence of Lord Methuen and Sir Redvers Buller that the position on the Modder was maintained at all.

Till the middle of January little occurred worthy of record. At first the only sign of energy on the British side was the sending of patrols northward and along the river banks, where they occasionally lost horses and men. Towards the end of December, and again in the middle of January, Lord Methuen made reconnaissances in force towards Cronje's position with the object of holding him fast in the Magersfontein trenches. Whether at any time Cronje entertained any plan of extensive operations to the southward is doubtful; at any rate the British demonstrations were calculated to keep him where he was, and to render him apprehensive of another frontal attack. That the anxiety of the Boer general and his men on this score was real was shown by a sudden wild outburst of rifle fire on the night of December 26th. For some minutes their long trenches were outlined with the sparkle of musketry, and the empty surface of the veldt was ploughed with lead. The next night four shells fired into their camps drew a similar reply. Unfortunate as our night operations generally were, this form of attack was undoubtedly more dreaded by the Boers than any other, owing to their want of discipline, the uncertain effect of their own weapon, the rifle, and their fear of the bayonet.

But while the main bodies lay inactive, events of some importance were occurring south of the Modder. Towards the close of the year roving bands of rebels had begun to threaten our communications from the direction of Douglas, and to terrorise over the loyalists who still lingered in that district. Another body of insurgents known as the Griqualand West Commando had laagered near Badenhorstfontein, a spot thirty miles west of Methuen's camp on the left bank of the river. Thence in the last days of December they had moved southwards, presumably to join the rebel commando from Douglas, and on the 31st of December stood 200 strong at Sunnyside, twenty-five miles north-west of Belmont. Thus placed they were within a day's march of the railway, which since the day of Magersfontein had been protected

AMBULANCE CROSSING THE MODDER.

by posts at Witteputs, Belmont, Enslin, Graspan, and Honeynestkloof, manned in part by the newly arrived Colonial contingents under Colonels Hoad and Otter. The nearness of the enemy to our communications made an attack on them both necessary and advantageous, and in Colonel Pilcher, who had taken over the command at Belmont on Christmas day, the troops possessed a capable leader. Before he had entered upon his new duties it had been decided at Methuen's headquarters that an expedition should be sent to Douglas on the first opportunity; and during the last week in December he had been busy with preparations for the march. His main object had been to increase the mobility of his infantry, and an experiment with buck waggons had satisfied him that one of these vehicles drawn by ten mules would carry fifteen men and their extra ammunition at a fair rate of speed. Some days, however, had elapsed before the various details could be worked out, and before he was ready to start news arrived of the Boer movement on Sunnyside. It was then arranged that he should attack the commando, and that detachments from all the posts along the railway should co-operate to prevent assistance reaching the enemy or interfering with his own advance. The danger of a flank attack from Cronje's position was to be met by General Babington's cavalry, while on the extreme left a squadron of the Scots Greys was to patrol the Orange River drifts. At the same time Colonel Alderson, with a detachment of New South Wales Mounted Rifles, some Mounted Infantry, and Rimington Guides, was to march from De Aar on Prieska with the object of checking the rebellion in that neighbourhood.

Elaborate precautions were taken to mislead the enemy as to the direction of the intended blow. Before taking the command at Belmont Colonel Pilcher had visited the various posts, and in company with Colonel Otter had made several ostentatious changes in the disposition of those east of the station. In the last days of December he industriously spread rumours of an advance towards Jacobsdal and the Riet, and on the afternoon of the 30th he issued orders for a movement into the Free State, giving out that troops were coming up from Capetown for an advance on Bloemfontein. At 4 p.m. on the 30th he marched north-east with the whole of his mounted troops, leaving orders for the rest

of the force [1] to follow in the morning. Two hours later he returned and countermanded the movement, giving as an excuse for the postponement the unreadiness of the supplies; and native spies, with orders to collect news of the enemy, were sent out towards the Free State frontier in the confident anticipation that they would betray their mission.

Having done all that he could to mislead his opponents Colonel Pilcher proceeded to execute his real project without delay. At 2.30 p.m. on the 31st he suddenly moved westward. His column consisted of two companies of Queenslanders with two galloping maxims under Colonel Ricardo, the Toronto Company and two maxims of the Canadian battalion, two guns of "P" Battery Royal Horse Artillery, forty of the Munsters, and two companies of the Cornwalls. The Canadians travelled in buck waggons, carrying 400 rounds per rifle, the Cornwalls followed the mounted troops on foot.

Soon after he started Pilcher halted the column, and for the first time explained his intentions. Then without a halt he pushed on to Thornhill, twenty-two miles from Belmont and fifteen from Sunnyside, and there bivouacked at 7 p.m. Every one he met on the way was arrested and confined in the various farms in order to prevent their carrying information to the enemy.

Next morning (1st January), at 6 a.m., the march was resumed, and shortly after sunrise the column was within sight of the Sunnyside kopjes which ran north and south across the line of the British advance. After a brief halt on the Verneukberg, the march was resumed. Showers of rain and the thickness of the grass prevented dust; some low scrub-covered kopjes hid the column; and shortly before 10 a.m. the British force, itself unobserved, caught sight of the enemy's laager on the eastern slopes of the ridge. Pilcher at once made his dispositions for the attack. Major de Rougemont, with his two guns of P Battery and the Canadian Infantry, was ordered to move to the right and take up a position north-east of the kopjes, while the Munsters under Ryan were to turn the enemy's left and press inwards

[1] The force at Belmont consisted of the Royal Canadian Regiment (1,000), Munster Fusiliers Mounted Infantry (60), Royal Horse Artillery two guns (54), Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (206), Queensland Mounted Infantry (250).

across their line of retreat. Colonel Pilcher, with the Queenslanders, wheeled to the left so as to outflank the right of the rebels from the southward. The two columns kept touch by means of strong patrols. These preparatory movements were carried out successfully. Soon after 11 a.m. De Rougemont seized a low ridge within 1,800 yards of the laager, the tents of which were just visible through the trees; his guns at once opened fire, the Toronto men hurried up, and the Mounted Infantry, who had covered the advance of the artillery, trotted off to the right to execute their turning movement.

Completely surprised the enemy streamed out of the camp and up the kopjes under a rain of shrapnel. Rallying on the crest they opened a heavy rifle fire, to which the Canadians replied. Ryan's men lined the bank of a dam from whence they could enfilade the Boer position, and for nearly two hours threw an effective cross fire upon the hills, making it impossible for the rebels to move without exposing themselves to our bullets.

Meanwhile Pilcher worked steadily round the enemy's right, and by 1.30 p.m. had gained their flank. The Queenslanders immediately attacked, one company moving straight upon the enemy, the other moving round towards his rear. Many of the Boers had already fled, but those who remained fought on doggedly pouring a hot fire upon the Australians. But the advance was never checked, and when the foremost reached the crest the enemy surrendered. Forty-two were captured, and about half as many were killed. The whole of their laager was taken, half-roasted sheep and cooking-pots full of soup bearing witness to the completeness of the surprise. The British casualties numbered two killed and three wounded, a striking proof of the skill with which the troops had been manœuvred.

That night Pilcher bivouacked at Dover Farm, seven miles from the scene of the combat, and next day, after a march of twenty miles, entered Douglas, to find that the Landrost and the rest of the rebels had disappeared. The column received an enthusiastic welcome from the remaining loyalists, a hundred of whom, on hearing that no permanent occupation of the place was contemplated, returned with the British commander to Belmont. On the 3rd of January began the

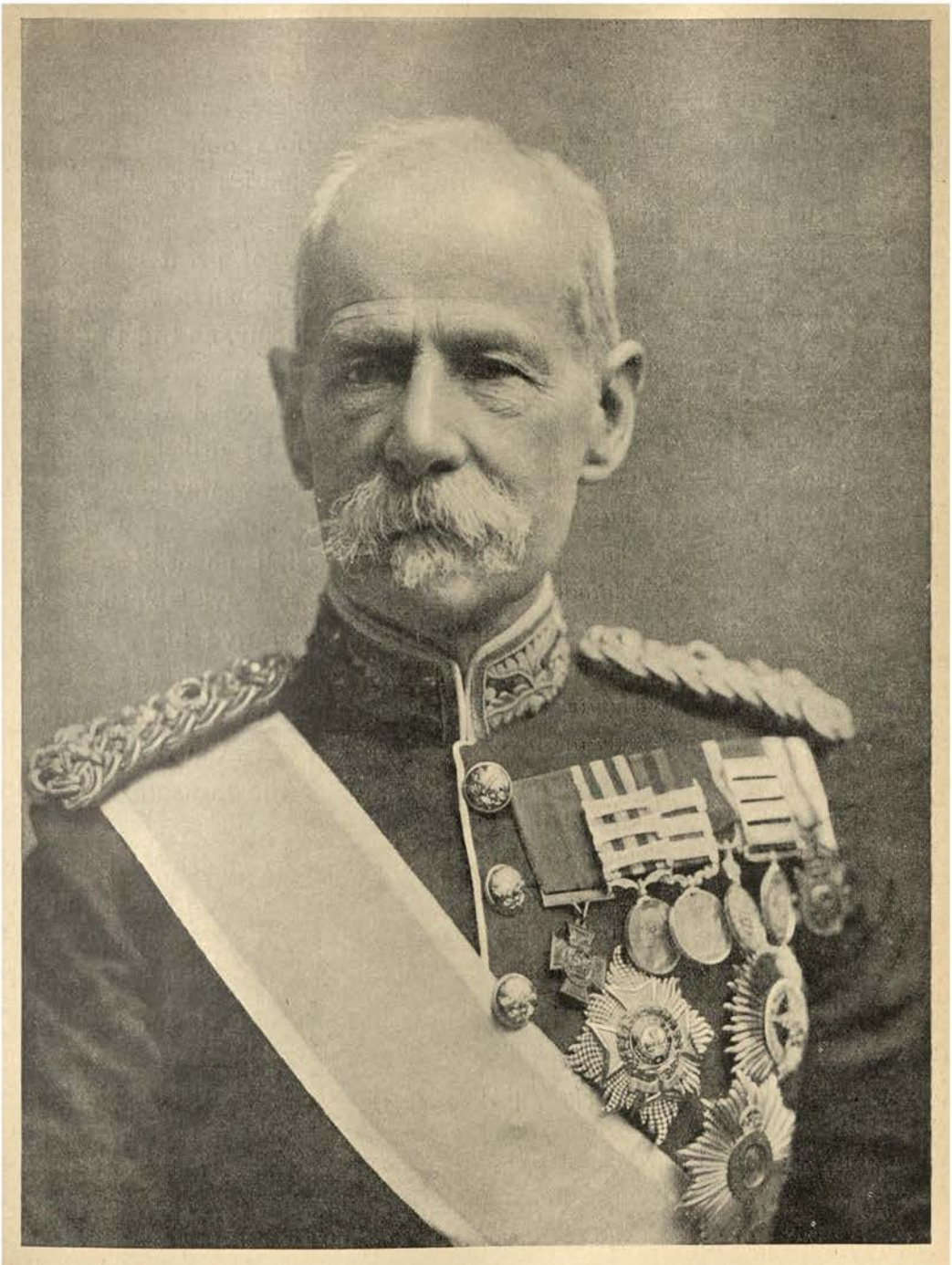
retirement; a critical operation, for on the same morning 600 Boers from Spytfontein crossed the Modder, and evading Babington, had got within reach of Pilcher's flank. But under cover of a demonstration beyond the Vaal, the little column reached Thornhill in safety, and next morning the infantry and baggage retired to Belmont. The artillery and Queenslanders remained at Thornhill during the day: but in the evening, hearing that the enemy were advancing, Colonel Pilcher started again, and reached Belmont at 9 a.m. on the following morning. Meanwhile Colonel Alderson, after a march of 120 miles in four days, had entered Prieska on January 3rd. Most of the inhabitants were undoubtedly contemplating rebellion, but as the northern commandos had not arrived the majority hesitated to commit themselves. Only a few rifle shots were fired as Alderson approached the town, and during the rest of the day no disturbance occurred. The Colonel addressed the townspeople, warned them of the consequences of rebellion, and leaving Captain Antill with 100 men in charge of the place, returned to De Aar, which he reached on January 8th. A fortnight later he started again with four companies of Mounted Infantry, some of Roberts's Horse, and six guns, and entered Prieska on the 27th with the intention of reinforcing the garrison. As, however, all the mounted men were needed for Lord Roberts's march on Bloemfontein, Alderson and Antill were recalled, and Prieska left to its own devices. These operations, combined with the success of Sunnyside, did much to tranquillise the districts west of the railway.

Other movements of the same kind were planned and carried out between the Orange and Modder Rivers during January. Ever since the skirmish of Zoutpan's Drift on December 13th parties of the enemy had been moving to and fro along the frontier from the Goemansberg to Jacobsdal; between which places ran Cronje's line of communication with Fauresmith and with the Boers in the Colony. On the evening of the 7th, in the hope of intercepting one of their convoys, Babington, with his Lancer Regiment, eighty Victorian Mounted Infantry, and G Battery left Methuen's camp at nine o'clock and marched twenty miles southward to Honeynest Kloof, where they bivouacked. On the morning of the 9th the brigade

marched south-east to the border fence, and for the first time entered the enemy's territory. Ram Dam, the farm of a Free Stater, was reached at 11.30, and in the afternoon a reconnaissance was pushed six miles further to the eastward. The only incident worthy of notice was the burning of a farm which had been used as a meeting-place by the enemy; the first instance of demolition occurring in the history of the war, and one for which there appears to have been no sufficient justification. The force returned and bivouacked at Ram Dam. Next day two farms belonging to Field Cornet Lubbe were burnt, but no Boers were encountered, and after some reconnoitring and sketching, which was afterwards to prove of value, the cavalry retired to Enslin. Concurrently with Babington's movement Pilcher marched from Belmont, while on the north Major Byrne pushed a reconnaissance towards Jacobsdal, and drew fire from a body of 700 Boers on the extreme left of Cronje's position. During these operations the slouch hats of the Colonials, afterwards so common a headdress, nearly caused a disaster. Some artillery belonging to another column caught sight of a body of Australians within shrapnel range, and took them for Boers, only discovering their mistake when the guns were already laid.

Meanwhile, in Lord Methuen's front, the Boers had now made their positions well-nigh impregnable. On the west Cronje's line extended to Koedoesberg, his centre ran from the railway at Spytfontein to Brown's Drift, his left covered the approaches to Jacobsdal at Rotfontein and Klipfontein Farms, near the first of which a fort had been erected. But he never seems to have realised that his best means of defence consisted in attacking the British communications, any more than he conceived it possible that his opponents would dare to quit the railway in order to turn his flank. Similarly he was so wedded to his *rôle* of impassive defence, and interpreted so narrowly his duties as the commander of the covering force, that he made no attempt to hasten the fall of Kimberley by reinforcing the besiegers. Motionless but confident he awaited the attack which was now rapidly preparing behind the line of the Modder.

Lord Roberts reached Cape Town on January 10th, the day on which Sir Redvers Buller began the march that ended in Spion Kop. Although



FIELD-MARSHAL LORD ROBERTS.

large reinforcements were pouring into South Africa, the Field-Marshal was not in a position to strike an immediate blow. His forces were scattered, the units were in many cases incomplete, and supplies and transport had to be collected. He was therefore obliged to stand on the defensive and to devote his whole energies to placing his numerous troops in a condition to undertake offensive operations on a large scale. This work of preparation was one of great complexity and difficulty; for it had to be carried on throughout a vast area of country, in a very limited time, in front of the enemy, and in the midst of a partially hostile population. The needs of the troops at the front had to be fully and punctually satisfied; the Colonial Corps which Lord Roberts immediately began to raise had to be drilled, equipped, and horsed; and immense supplies of food, forage, waggons, mules, and oxen, had to be concentrated at the required spots. Most difficult of all, this mass had to be directed to the accomplishment of a definite purpose, and impelled with speed and foresight. The available materials do not allow us to follow in detail the administrative history of the month in which the new commander, aided by his loyal and capable chief of the staff, created a mobile army out of a number of scattered and partially immobile units. We can, however, glean from the published documents the main objects he had in view, and the measures he took for their attainment.

The situation which he had to face has been sufficiently described in the foregoing pages. Although, as he wrote to Lord Lansdowne on January 12th, it had become less acute during the preceding weeks owing to the failure of the enemy to utilise their victories, it was still one which allowed neither of delay nor hesitation. Sir Redvers Buller's view that, at the moment of the arrival of the Field-Marshal and the reinforcements, the position of affairs was practically that "in which we rather hoped to have found matters when I originally arrived," [1] although correct in the sense that the defensive phase had been tided over without absolute disaster, made no allowance for two important considerations: first, that the situation was not the result of a deliberately accepted defensive attitude but of an abortive offensive,

[1] Royal Commission, Question 15140.

of lost actions in the field; secondly, that the resisting power of Kimberley and Ladysmith, in spite of the proximity of the relief columns, was daily diminishing. The arrival of Lord Roberts and the fresh troops undoubtedly cheered the supporters of the British cause and correspondingly depressed the enemy; but it did not of itself cut the knot of the earlier entanglements, restore to our scattered forces their lost initiative, silence the mutterings of rebellion or obliterate the impression that the British reverses had left behind.[1] All this still remained to be done, and it was clear to the new commander, as it was to Lord Wolseley, that it could only be effected by an irruption sudden, sustained, and irresistible into the very heart of the Free State. Once launched, such a movement would compel the enemy to slacken their hold on Natal and Cape Colony and hasten back, as though drawn by a loadstone, to protect their own homes.

The quickest and surest way of producing this result was to threaten the enemy's most cherished possession. This was inevitably Bloemfontein. The town was the centre from which the reins of control spread to every commando of Free Staters, an important railway junction, and the principal depôt of supplies. Through it lay the communication with Pretoria and Lorenzo Marquez, and upon it all the southern Boer armies were based. To march against it was to endanger the whole system of the enemy's defence, to divert to its protection all the forces of the Free Staters, and to test to the uttermost the loyalty of their Transvaal allies. Not only would the movement free our territory from the invaders, but it promised opportunities of decisively defeating their forces in the field, the quickest means of terminating the war. For to abandon Bloemfontein without resistance was tantamount to admitting a fatal military inferiority, to yield to the invader an excellent base for further offensive operations, and to incur a moral loss more important perhaps than any of the material disadvantages.

So far Lord Roberts's views were in agreement with those of Lord Wolseley and the great mass of military opinion in England and in South Africa. But in his choice of the method of execution he

[1] Compare Sir A. Milner's despatch of February 4th. See below, p. 295.

struck out a new line; and as his decision had very far-reaching consequences, it must be discussed in detail.

In his first telegram of December 23rd, despatched to General Buller before he left England and six days after his appointment to the chief command, he made no mention of the projected change. Referring in general terms to his intention of invading the Free State, he merely emphasised the importance of concentrating in Cape Colony all the troops available for a march on Bloemfontein. With this object he directed that if Ladysmith and Kimberley were relieved before he was ready to move, the relieving columns should fall back respectively to the Tugela and the Modder and there await his signal for the general advance. His telegram of the 28th from Madeira was couched in the same sense, emphasising the view that until the 6th Division had landed he did not "consider the *status quo* altogether undesirable." We shall see that throughout he inclined strongly to this opinion, and deprecated any secondary enterprise until the main operation had taken effect.

At Capetown he received information which must have seemed to him, holding the views he did, particularly opportune. His telegram of December 23rd had crossed one from Buller to the Secretary of State in which the former developed a plan which he had suggested a week before to Methuen. He proposed that Cronje's position should be turned by means of a railway laid from Modder River to Jacobsdal, in the belief that the occupation of that village would frighten the Boers out of Spytfontein, relieve Kimberley, and directly threaten Bloemfontein. On the arrival of the 6th Division he wished to extend the lateral railway to the Free State capital, to fortify and provision Modder River, Bloemfontein, Norval's Pont and Orange River Bridge, and thoroughly to subjugate the interior of the quadrilateral of which those points formed the angles. These posts and the railways connecting them were then to form a base from which mobile columns could operate in all directions, while a force from Natal was to pass Van Reenan's, establish a subsidiary base at Harrismith, and hold itself in readiness to meet attacks from the south, north, or west.

We shall see later how far the plan chosen by Lord Roberts was

calculated to obtain the advantages promised by the adoption of the scheme of the quadrilateral. For the present it is enough to note that the Field-Marshal, after referring it to Colonel Girouard and learning that the proposed line could be laid at the rate of a mile a day without interfering with the service of those already existing, discarded it in favour of a more rapid and effective method, independent of railways.[1] Nevertheless, this scheme of General Buller's, in so far as its direction was concerned, was practically the same as that which Lord Roberts afterwards adopted; and on December 28th we find the former, in a summary of the general situation, again advocating an advance by Jacobsdal on Bloemfontein as easier and quicker than that by Norval's Pont. Yet again, on January 3rd, he telegraphed to Capetown that in his opinion an advance up the right bank of the Riet by Kaalspruit would draw the main Boer forces, including Cronje's 8–9,000 men at Scholtz Nek, towards Bloemfontein; that, according to rumour, Steyn had himself expressed his inability to cope with such a movement, that the country between the Norval's Pont and Kimberley Railways was level and open, and that the capital, the armament of whose forts had been removed to Kimberley, was defenceless. The Boers on the Orange River under Grobelaar he reckoned at 5,000 strong, exclusive of rebels.

Thus General Buller's evident preference for an advance from the western line confirmed the opinions that his successor had already formed. Some years before he had come to the conclusion that, even if the hostility of the Free State left the Norval's Pont route available, "the very difficult country north of the Orange River" was a decisive

[1] It may be doubted how far the laying of the line to Jacobsdal was feasible for a force of the strength of that commanded by Methuen. It would have involved the crossing of the Riet, the permanent occupation of Jacobsdal, and a ten-mile extension of front. Moreover, even had a judicious distribution of his heavy artillery rendered it practicable, as Buller suggested in his message of December 31st, it is not certain that Cronje would have retreated; for it was still open to him to bring his supply convoys across the Modder by the higher drifts and along its north bank behind the screen of the river. Jacobsdal certainly was a shorter and more convenient route, and he would probably have fought hard to retain it, but its loss did not necessitate a retreat. The cumbrousness, slowness, and lack of secrecy entailed by the railway scheme needs no comment.

objection to adopting it as a line of operations.[1] To this drawback the momentary situation had added others equally serious.

The original plan of campaign, which consisted in an advance across the Orange River based on the southern ports and the convergent lines of railway was indeed still possible; but it no longer offered the advantages which it had possessed when the scheme had been formed. The way to the river was now barred by the enemy at Stormberg and Colesberg; and in the broken country north of these points it would have been easy to delay the British army and gain time enough to break the bridges.[2] The forcing of the stream would then have become a difficult operation, and the advantage of an initial surprise would have been lost. Even after the crossings had been seized, some time must have elapsed before railway communication with the southern bank could have been restored and stores and transport brought up sufficient to enable the army to move.[3] The Boers would then have retired, turning to fight in every favourable position, removing the rolling-stock and so damaging the railway that

[1] Lord Wolseley, in his comments on Sir Redvers Buller's memorandum of September 24, 1899, states that his main reasons for preferring the Bethulie route to that over Laing's Nek were the tactical advantages that it offered to our troops. It would seem, then, that it was a better line than that through Natal, but considerably more difficult than that by Jacobsdal. The German Staff History says:—" . . . the inhospitable and mountainous country north of the river, especially round Donkerspoort, and the maze of hill-tops offering numerous positions lying one behind the other, was extraordinarily favourable, not merely to defence in itself, but above all to the fighting methods of the Boers."

[2] We do not suggest that the enemy would have attempted to offer serious resistance south of the Orange River. By massing his army south of Colesberg, and moving directly on Achtertang or Norval's Pont, or by sending a flying column across country to Rietfontein Drift or Bethulie, Lord Roberts could have forced the enemy to regain the northern bank in a very few days. But the bridges would in the meantime have been broken. In the first days after his arrival he seems to have hoped that a *coup de main* on the part of French might possibly save one of them, and to have considered the feasibility of co-operating with his cavalry commander by sending a column along the northern bank from Orange River Bridge. Later on (Jan. 25th) he negatived French's proposal of a sudden march on Bethulie on the ground that the difficulties might prove too great, and that he hoped before long to attain the same result by other means.

[3] Eventually the passages at Norval's Pont and Bethulie passed into the hands of the British troops on March 15th. The bridge at the former place was not repaired until March 29th, that at Bethulie until April 10th, delays respectively of fourteen and twenty-six days.

our troops would probably have had to rely upon supply by road alone. The enemy would have been able to bring up reinforcements from the north and from Kimberley; and there was a danger that Lord Roberts's advance would not have made its weight felt soon enough to save the town from surrender,[1] a loss indeed only temporarily important if the main operation succeeded, but, as matters then stood, certain to cause a complication of the very kind from which it was one of Lord Roberts's principal objects to keep his strategy free. Indeed, he seems at one time to have thought[2] that the fall of Bloemfontein would have been followed by a strong concentration of all the available Boer forces between it and Kimberley, and that he would have been obliged to march against them across the veldt or to send a part of his army round to the Modder by rail; the last a cumbrous process rendered uncertain by the likelihood of attacks on the line. In the light of after events we cannot believe that the enemy would have maintained the investment at a moment when the Free State capital was threatened from the south; it seems far more likely that they would have drawn together to defend it, and in the event of failure retired northwards upon Kroonstadt. But it is unquestionable that the delays imposed by the obstacles on the southern route would have given the enemy time to organise a strong frontal opposition, in face of which it would have been very difficult to obtain decisive successes in the field. That even under these circumstances the army would ultimately have reached Bloemfontein from Norval's Pont cannot be doubted; but the momentum which is essential to the highest strategic success would have been lost.

It was just this sustained and rapid momentum that it was Lord Roberts's first object to secure. The theory of seizing the strategic initiative and retaining it throughout was nowhere likely to find better opportunities for its exemplification than amongst

[1] Lord Roberts states that Colonel Kekewich had informed him that Kimberley could not hold out beyond the end of February. There is every reason for believing that it could have prolonged its resistance for at least another week. In forming his plan, however, he must necessarily have taken the earlier date as a basis for his calculations.

[2] Royal Commission, Question 10843. This opinion appears inconsistent with those expressed elsewhere. Throughout the central idea of his campaign was the effect that a march on Bloemfontein would exert upon the enemy in other parts of the theatre of war.

the widely scattered and loosely organised commandos in the Free State. But to make the most of them it was absolutely essential that the first sweep of the British attack should catch the enemy scattered and unprepared, and that no preliminary check should give him time to impede or to avoid it. There was but one way of doing this. The new commander resolved to utilise the railway bridge east of Hopetown, the only passage of the Orange River still remaining in British hands,[1] mass his army north of the stream,[2] and relying on waggon convoys for his supplies, make the best of his way to the enemy's capital. By so acting he would turn the hill and river position at Norval's Pont, cross the frontier at a comparatively unguarded spot, and threaten the enemy's communications on every part of the southern theatre of war.

It was a bold design, for, with all its advantages, it involved the acceptance of considerable risks. The temporary abandonment of the railway was in itself a totally new departure. The difficulty of supplying a large mass of men and animals would be enormously increased by any reverse, and in view of our previous experiences it was impossible to predicate unbroken success. Lord Roberts himself seems to have felt this strongly. Throughout we find him referring to the necessity of employing all the available troops. As early as December 23rd he asked General Buller how many troops he would be able to spare as soon as Ladysmith is relieved. On January 12th, replying to Lord Lansdowne's question as to the need of further reinforcements,[3] he consented, in view of the few regular troops remaining at home,

[1] Sir William Butler had early foreseen the importance of Orange River Bridge, and in his proposals of June 14, 1899, for the defence of the British possessions in South Africa had contemplated a possible concentration from the east on that point. Later on General Forestier-Walker had worked on the same lines.

[2] In Colonel Altham's minute of September, 1898, the Orange River is described as a "military obstacle of some importance, impassable as a rule, except at the bridges, for the first three months in the year, and even at other times somewhat difficult to cross owing to the quicksands and liability to sudden flood."

[3] The letter (January 9th) had promised, in addition to the 7th Division, four Brigade Divisions of Field Artillery, 7,000 Infantry Volunteers, the C.I.V., the Elswick Battery, 3,000 Colonials, and seven Militia Battalions. Lord Roberts asked for eight more.

not to ask for the 8th Division and 4th Cavalry Brigade [1] until the result of General Buller's operations in Natal was known; but on the same day he warned Lord Methuen that he might find it necessary to employ a part of his troops in the main operation; and on January 30th he telegraphed to the Secretary of State that he had postponed his departure for about a week in order to collect a larger force. He had always to face the possibility that so soon as his movement began the commandos in the Free State would be strongly reinforced by rail from other parts of the theatre of war; indeed, one of his reasons for moving on Kimberley was that it enabled him to attack the Boer forces in detail. We shall see later whether his force proved needlessly strong and cumbrous for the work it had to do, and how far his numerical superiority was real or apparent.[2]

Having resolved to base his force on the western line and to mass it along the railway north of Orange River, he had still to decide what form his opening operations, on the success of which everything depended, should take. Practically two alternative routes were open to him, one by Fauresmith to the Bloemfontein railway, the other along the courses of the Riet and Modder. For a time he seems to have contemplated an advance on the first named line, which was more directly calculated to free Cape Colony of its invaders and to offer opportunities of defeating them as they retired. But apart from the possibility that such a march would not immediately affect the situation at Kimberley, and that the enemy might evade the intended blow by a retreat along the Basutoland frontier, want of good topographical information presented serious obstacles to the adoption of this plan. "I felt tolerably sure," says Lord Roberts,[3] "that a move towards Bloemfontein from some point between the Orange and Modder Rivers, on the De Aar-Kimberley railway, would, by threatening their communications, have the effect of making the Boer forces retire from their

[1] These formations would leave in England only seven Infantry Battalions, five Line Cavalry Regiments, and part of the Household Cavalry.

[2] Royal Commission, Question 10843. On January 12th he estimated the enemy's forces as at the outside 80,000 strong. Of these it was quite possible that 15–20,000 would be concentrated to oppose his advance.

[3] 10843.

position in front of Generals French and Gatacre, and Cronje from his in front of Methuen, and thus open the way to Kimberley, but it was extremely difficult to decide on the best route to take, as I could get no trustworthy information as to the nature of the ground between the De Aar-Kimberley and Springfontein-Bloemfontein railways. There were no roads to speak of; it was, indeed, the doubt of being able to find a sufficient supply of water that finally determined me to move along the Modder."

Nevertheless, as late as January 26th he still hoped to move directly upon the railway south of Bloemfontein.

On that day, in a letter to Lord Lansdowne, after deploring the reverse[1] in Natal and the delays imposed on his own operations by the incompleteness of the transport, he writes: "I trust, when I do start, I shall have sufficient to enable the force to strike the railway at Springfontein[2] or thereabouts. The enemy will be compelled by my being there to evacuate their positions at Burghersdorp and Colesberg. For the construction of temporary bridges at Norval's Pont and Bethulie Railway Bridge, and also for the rapid reconstruction of the two permanent railway bridges, materials are all ready. I trust the move towards Bloemfontein will necessitate the enemy lessening their hold on the Modder River and Natal." The Fauresmith route was here plainly indicated; but in the next few hours he altered his plan. On the 27th he telegraphed to the Secretary of State that he intended to enter the Free State in the neighbourhood of Methuen's camp, and, turning Cronje's flank, effect the relief of Kimberley.

We have already seen that the primary reason for the change of the line of advance was the certain water supply afforded by the Modder. But the alteration brought with it other possibilities, and although the exact amount of weight which Lord Roberts attached to them severally is not quite clear, he cannot have failed to take them into account. In the first place, if, following the course Sir Redvers

[1] Spion Kop.

[2] Springfontein is in a straight line about 100 miles from Orange River Bridge, about 90 from Jacobsdal, 80 from Bloemfontein, and 30 from Colesberg Bridge and Bethulie. See sketch p. 157.

Buller had recommended, he marched on Bloemfontein between the Riet and Modder, he ran a certain risk of being attacked by Cronje in flank and rear. It was of course possible, perhaps even probable, that the movement of a powerful force through Jacobsdal would of itself have caused Cronje to abandon Kimberley and fall back along the right bank of the Modder to defend Bloemfontein while the invading army hastened along the left. But he might equally have chosen to take up a flanking position, from which he could harass the British line of march; and until it was certain that the Boer General had abandoned all design against his communication, Roberts would have been obliged to leave detachments behind him. Had Cronje so chosen, he could have interfered very seriously with the British advance upon the capital and gained time for fresh commandos to come up and oppose it in front. It is quite true that, as events turned out, the southern Boers failed to act with the necessary energy; but at the time a rapid concentration to oppose Lord Roberts was perfectly feasible, and in planning the operation on which all depended, the British General was bound to minimise as far as possible the chances of a check at its commencement. He was thoroughly justified in assuming that his enemies would do the right thing; and his best and safest course was therefore to anticipate them by paralysing their nearest force before it could interfere with the execution of his march on Bloemfontein. For this reason alone he would have been right in endeavouring to render Cronje innocuous before he himself turned eastward, or at least to shift him from his menacing position on the flank of the intended line of advance on the capital.

So regarded, his intended operation had something of a precautionary and defensive nature; but Lord Roberts contemplated much more than the mere protection of his flank, and incidental advantages of position and the method of its execution gave the development of his plan an essentially offensive character. That this was sound strategy cannot be doubted. The British general was, in fact, merely carrying out his principle of beating the enemy in detail. Cronje's army constituted what Moltke would have called "a true strategic objective," that is to say, a force which there was a good chance of beating, and which it was well

worth while to beat. Its prestige, and that of its leader, ranked higher perhaps than that of any other Boer army or general, and the effect of its discomfiture would be correspondingly great. It was within easier reach, and strategically more vulnerable than the Boers on the southern frontier. The troops of Lord Methuen, which could be reckoned as available for purposes of co-operation, formed a screen behind which the main army could be massed within one to four days' march of Cronje's flank; a blow could be struck at his line of communication with Bloemfontein without endangering that of the assailant; and his defeat or retirement would inevitably be followed by the break up of the investment of Kimberley, and the collapse of the Boer defensive in the Free State.

So far, then, as the movement on Kimberley facilitated the defeat of Cronje's army, was it justified by the strictest principles of strategy. But the fact that Lord Roberts made no mention of the Boer force in his despatches until the evening of February 16th, and always referred to the intended operation as the "relief of Kimberley," has given rise to the criticism that he attached too much importance to the fate of the town, and too little to the defeat of the active forces of the enemy. It has been pointed out that whereas the quickest and most effective way of breaking up the investment was to drive away or destroy the Boer army, no trace of such a design can be found in the published documents until after the cavalry had entered Kimberley; with the natural inference that the major object was subordinated to the minor, and that, so far as this was the case, the conception of the plan, whatever form its execution may have taken, was radically false.

This contention is undoubtedly founded on fact. From the first Lord Roberts attached great importance to the safety of Kimberley; indeed, as we have seen, one of the main reasons for the change of his line of operations from Norval's Pont to Orange River Bridge was that its relief would be thereby accelerated. His selection of the Modder line in preference to that of Fauresmith-Springfontein brought his army still nearer to the besieged town and gave him an opportunity of relieving it directly, although, according to his own account, not this, but the want of a sufficient supply of water, was the deciding cause of the change. That apart from the time and manner of its

relief he was right in setting great store on Kimberley we do not think any one will deny. In addition to its great consequence in the eyes of the white and coloured populations of South Africa, the town had acquired through the events of the campaign a real military value. Revictualled and its railway communication with the south restored, it became important as a depôt for hospitals and stores; and as a base for columns moving northward on Mafeking, or towards Bloemfontein. With its workshops, extemporised fortifications, and volunteer garrison, it was fitted to play a part on the western railway similar to that filled by Bloemfontein on the eastern, and later on, when the war grew more and more local in character, it was to become essential to our hold on the country. Quite apart, therefore, from its position as a besieged city, its strategic relation to the proposed extension of the theatre of operations made its early relief a matter of vital importance.

But by themselves these considerations do not account for the course which Lord Roberts adopted; and we look in vain for a really adequate explanation of the extreme haste with which, temporarily neglecting his true objective, he pressed forward to the relief of the town. The most probable reason, which has been advanced in various forms, was the urgent moral need of a tangible success. It seems probable that the news of Spion Kop, and the bad effects of that failure upon South African opinion, impressed the Field-Marshal with the urgent necessity of relieving Kimberley as a set-off against the possible loss of Ladysmith. The operation was no doubt further precipitated by the danger of a sudden collapse of Kimberley's defence. It is evident that the alarming information which reached the British commander the day before the Cavalry started must have aroused apprehension as to the internal condition of the town. The effect of a surrender would unquestionably have been deep and widespread; and a Boer occupation even if only temporary, would certainly have complicated and delayed the effective invasion of the Free State. Lord Roberts may have thought, not altogether unreasonably, that the prevention of such a disaster was well worth a special effort; all the more so because if, as was not improbable, Cronje himself attempted to retire northward upon Boshof, a flying column near the town would be able to check or harass

his retreat. At any rate, although the Field-Marshal was undoubtedly led by his information to exaggerate Kimberley's danger, and, as the event proved, would have been able to relieve it with equal certainty by a direct attack upon the Boer army, the course he adopted must have appealed with great force to a commander in his position, who was keenly alive to the importance of the moral effect of the relief, and was anxious at the outset to free himself from the incubus of a besieged town. For these reasons, to attach to the operation, as one writer [1] has recently done, the derogatory epithet of "sensational," appears not only unfair but to imply a misconception of the factors which the General has to take into consideration. The influence of the so-called political factor, which writers are too frequently inclined to treat as more or less negligible, is one to which even the strongest minds, rightly or wrongly, have given way; and has probably outweighed purely military considerations at least as often as it has yielded to them.

To make sure of Kimberley, then, was Lord Roberts's first object. Of course it must not be concluded that, even at the commencement, his intentions were confined to the relief of the town. It was but the first act in the strategic drama; and its successful performance, unquestionably great as would be its moral effect, still left the main problem unsolved. That Lord Roberts really lost sight of this fact no one who has studied the campaign can suppose for a moment. But the disadvantage of the plan he adopted lay in this: that it postponed the real decision, and by directing the energies of his army against a secondary objective, rendered the success of the main operation more uncertain. The fact that at the beginning he could not foresee what Cronje would do, and that the correct and therefore the presumable course for the Boer leader to adopt, was a timely retirement to the north or east, increased the importance of striking him at the earliest possible moment. None of the counter-arguments—and, as we shall see later on, military considerations as well as those relating to Kimberley appear to have influenced the British general—seem to establish the validity of the relief scheme, which relegated his true objective, the Boer

[1] See "Icona's" article on "The Strategy of the Paardeberg Campaign," in the *United Services Magazine* for December, 1903.

army, to a secondary position in point of time. The whole of the campaign, as was shown by the event, depended on the infliction of a heavy defeat on Cronje's force. The feasibility of the cross-country march, the dispersion of the Free State commandos and the capture of Bloemfontein hung on the result of the first collision. That in spite of these considerations the Field-Marshal should have preferred to postpone it is the more remarkable in that he seems throughout to have been keenly sensible of the risks that any interruption of the further advance would impose. By this may be judged the importance he attached to Kimberley's relief: from this arose his determination to strengthen the active army to the utmost possible extent. Like Napoleon in 1806, he might have said: "With this immense superiority of force united on so narrow a front you will understand that I wish to risk nothing"; to neutralise, that is, every risk that it is within the power of the general to foresee and prevent.

But in order to ensure success on the Modder Lord Roberts deliberately denuded Cape Colony of troops, and in so doing incurred a danger which was strikingly portrayed in Sir Alfred Milner's memorandum of February 4th, written a week before the campaign began. With every month, maintained the High Commissioner, that the war lasted without decisive results—and an immediate result was out of the question—the danger of rebellion increased. This was the more the case at a time when the fear of large reinforcements from England had diminished and the fresh troops had reached Orange River. It had been freely stated that the Dutch were only waiting till our army was well to the front to rise behind it. There was no definite plan, but that was in men's minds, and a small revolt would spread like wildfire. If this occurred our communications would be endangered and the enemy's fighting force increased. He then went on to develop his suggestions for the defence of the Colony. A stationary system of defence, he said, would require 50,000 men to be effective. What was wanted were 5,000 mobile troops always ready. The task was twofold; invaders had to be kept out, and local risings crushed. The main danger of invasion was in the Stormberg-Steynsburg corner, on Gatacre's left and left rear. Any commando penetrating there might

raise 10,000 rebels in the midlands and cut our defensive system in two. A force was therefore needed on the cross line between Stormberg and Naawpoort.[1] Another weak spot was the Prieska neighbourhood. Local risings might occur anywhere and everywhere, but could be easily overcome by small well-armed forces with a few guns. The south-eastern districts had been rendered safe by the embodiment of local defence organisations; in the other portions of the Colony the garrison would have to be found by oversea troops. Infantry posts on the railways were useless; the only way to defend them was to strike the enemy while still distant. He proposed that three or four central points near the main lines should be selected, entrenched, provisioned, and turned into training camps; that each should contain a Militia battalion, half a battery, 300 Yeomanry, one or two machine guns, and a few scouts; and that the mobile part of the force should always be ready to move far and strike swiftly. As possible sites for such camps he suggested Graaf Reinet, Cradock, Hex River, and Carnarvon, particularly emphasising the need of a strong post on the left of the western line. Up to that time our forces had been placed east of or on this railway, which had become our military boundary, and was constantly exposed to attack from the west. The four central posts, he calculated, would only require 5,000 men and two batteries.

To this remarkably clear and comprehensive survey of our requirements in the Colony Lord Roberts replied on the following day by an equally clear statement of the other side of the question. While admitting the danger of the position, he held that prompt and decisive action alone could end the war and with it the perils of revolt; that Kimberley must be relieved before the end of February, and that until that took place Methuen's force would not be available for active operations. He hoped also that his movement would facilitate the relief of Ladysmith, and pointed out that, while the risk of rebellion was problematical, the fall of both towns unless they were relieved at an early date was certain, and would have a far-reaching effect, not only on the inhabitants of South Africa, but on the prestige of the British

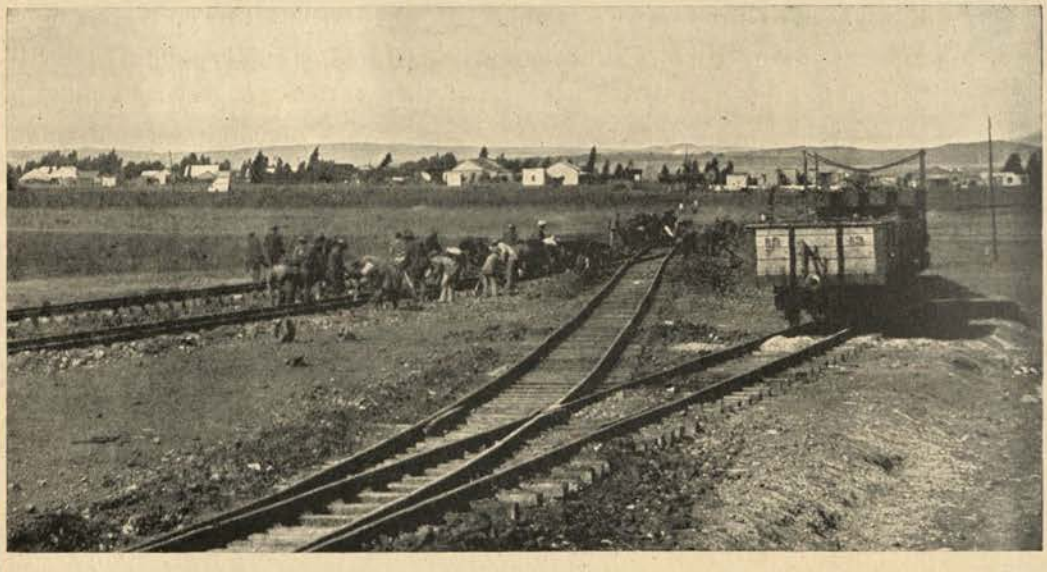
[1] In January the 6th Division had been sent to this neighbourhood, but had afterwards been moved to Orange River to take part in the main advance.

army and the fortunes of the war. He urged further that vigorous blows in the Free State would lessen in every way the danger of a rising in Cape Colony by drawing the burghers away to the defence of their homes and by cowing the rebels. He then proceeded to enumerate the reinforcements, amounting to 15 batteries of Field, 2 companies of Garrison Artillery, and at least 10,000 men, which would become available by the end of the month, sketched out their distribution; and summarised his views thus: "I am as anxious to provide for the summary repression of rebellion within the Colony as to defeat the enemy outside the Colony. If I succeed in attaining the latter object I shall go far to securing the former, but the converse does not hold good. For this reason I consider it a sounder policy to incur some slight risk of internal disturbance, than for the purpose of avoiding such a risk to abandon Kimberley, or endeavour to relieve it with an insufficient force." How thoroughly those sentences were justified during the following weeks is a matter of history, but at the moment of writing everything was dark and uncertain, and it will be remembered to Lord Roberts's lasting credit that at that difficult time he held firmly by his original intention.

The first essential of success was a transport service which would ensure the regular supply of the army when it left the railway. For the first time in the campaign long and swift offensive operations covering many days were in contemplation, and to render such movements possible vast quantities of stores would have to accompany the fighting troops. It was therefore necessary that large supply-parks, called by the German rolling magazines, should be ready to follow the advance, and that all the combatant units should have enough transport to provide for their immediate wants and for the prompt forwarding of stores from the great reserve convoys behind. When Lord Roberts landed neither troops nor transport were collected at the required spots. By the order of Sir Redvers Buller, issued owing to a very natural misinterpretation of a sentence in Lord Roberts's telegram of December 23rd,[1] the available mule- and ox-waggons had been distributed along

[1] Lord Roberts spoke of carrying out the "original plan," a phrase which Sir Redvers interpreted to mean an advance along the three lines of railway to the Orange River bridges. This, it will be remembered, constituted the first step in the old scheme.

all the three lines of Cape railways, instead of being concentrated, in accordance with the new strategic plan, in the neighbourhood of Orange River Bridge. Of over 19,000 mules and over 11,000 oxen, which with their waggons had been brought together during the preceding months, about two-thirds were massed along the western line from Modder River to Capetown; the rest, with the exception of the remaining third of ox-waggons which were at Queenstown, were scattered between Port Elizabeth and Naauwpoort, East London and Sterkstroom. Fully half of the available mule-transport had already



ON THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION.

been allotted to the troops of Methuen, French, and Gatacre; the remainder was being trained and organised in rear by companies of the Army Service Corps, pending the arrival of the reinforcements to which it was to be attached. The ox-transport, with the exception of about 100 waggons with the British columns, was ready organised for the purpose of furnishing supply-parks at Orange River Bridge, De Aar, and Queenstown. This mass of animals and vehicles practically represented the transport which had been intended for the use of the 1st Army Corps, and had been left by General Buller in Cape Colony

when he went to Natal.[1] After deductions had been made for sick or unsuitable animals, it was barely sufficient for the needs of the army Lord Roberts intended to employ in his main operation, which amounted, as we shall see, to the strength of one army corps and cavalry division reinforced by a numerous body of mounted infantry. But as, by the time the fresh troops had arrived, the total force in Cape Colony considerably exceeded these numbers, it became necessary either to wait for more transport, or temporarily to deprive the units not engaged in the advance on Kimberley of a part of their waggons. To adopt the first alternative would have caused a month's delay, which must inevitably have resulted in the loss of Kimberley. The only course therefore open to Lord Roberts was to provide the army under his own command with sufficient transport, and to trust to the arrival of fresh supplies of mule harness and animals to make good the deficiencies which the requirements of the active army had caused in other columns. Redistribution, in the shape of the concentration of all the available transport near the Orange River Bridge, was unavoidable.

The transference of this large quantity of mules, oxen, and vehicles from all parts of Cape Colony was in itself a great undertaking; its reallotment at the new base and its subsequent employment in the field were complicated by the introduction of an entirely different organisation. The system pursued in the first months of the campaign had been that laid down in the War Office Regulations. Each unit of the first Army Corps had been supplied with sufficient transport to convey the necessary ammunition and stores, and two or three days' food; the waggons being permanently attached to the battalion, regiment, or brigade division to which they had been given, and placed in charge of a regimental officer specially detailed for the purpose. The supply columns for brigades, divisional and corps troops carrying one day's food and forage, and the supply-park for the Army Corps carrying three or more days' food were managed by officers of

[1] The above figures are taken from Colonel Clayton's table showing the allotment of Field Transport in Cape Colony on January 10, 1900. (See Report of the Royal Commission, App. Vol. p. 238.)

the Army Service Corps. The chief advantages of this, the Regimental system, were the direct interest taken by fighting units in their own permanently attached transport on the efficiency of which they knew their own comfort to depend, the attachment of the supply columns or replenishing transport to certain combatant units and the responsibility of those units for their safety, and the action of these supply columns as funnels through which the contents of the supply-parks or rolling magazines could reach the troops. The Regimental system was also specially adapted to the numbers and organisation of the Army Service Corps companies, and had the further recommendation of being universally known and understood in the army. It did not, however, recommend itself to Lord Roberts, who, noting the small mobility shown by our columns in the early months of the war, seems somewhat hastily to have concluded that this was due to the system of transport; not, as was really the case, to the incomplete development of that system. He does not appear to have understood that while the Regimental transport and supply column organisation was simply intended as a funnel of supply, the size of the convoys behind was only limited by the available amount of transport and road room. This supposed lack of carrying capacity was not the only disadvantage which the Regimental system in his eyes possessed. Looking forward to long and widely-dispersed operations of uneven pace and changing objective, he feared that the large amount of transport material, which under the Regimental system is permanently attached to stationary troops, would be wasted,[1] while the columns engaged in active operations were running short. In the same way the stationary troops, if suddenly called upon to move, might find their regimental transport insufficient, and be seriously delayed while waiting for more to arrive. Hoping, therefore, to remedy these disadvantages by giving the central authorities a stronger control over the available transport, he determined, with the concurrence of Lord Kitchener, to

[1] It seems a mistake to suppose that in all circumstances waggons attached to stationary troops are wasted. They are often necessary for the purposes of conveying stores from magazines to the encampments. In this respect the lack of waggons seems to have been severely felt by the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Brigades during their sojourn at Kimberley.

introduce the Departmental system, which consists in reducing the amount of transport remaining permanently with a combatant unit to the smallest possible proportions, and in collecting all the remaining vehicles and animals in separate organised units under the direct control of the transport department. By this means the central authorities would retain power of reallotment according to the circumstances of the moment.

Having decided upon making the change,[1] Lord Roberts immediately issued a field order demanding an exact return of the amount of transport in the possession of each corps; and on its receipt directed that with the exception of water-carts, ammunition carts, ambulances, and the waggons carrying the equipment of the artillery and engineers,[2] the whole of it should be handed over to the newly constituted officials of the Transport Department. The regimental mule transport thus withdrawn was then reorganised in companies of fifty-one waggons (ten mules per waggon) under officers of the Army Service Corps and special service officers, each company carrying the baggage and two days' supplies of food and forage for an infantry brigade of four battalions, and being provided with an establishment of Europeans and natives. The ox-transport was similarly organised in companies of 100 waggons, and was officered in the same way. The old supply column organisation was broken up, and companies of the Army Service Corps were placed in charge of more than double their regulation complement of mule

[1] The alteration may have been determined on during the voyage from England. Both the new commander and his Chief of the Staff had seen the Departmental system at work in India and Egypt, and do not appear to have been properly acquainted with the working of the Regimental system. The fact that two such distinguished soldiers should have been unacquainted with the capabilities of the system of transport in use amongst the home forces is a curious instance of the want of contact which existed, and probably still exists, between the different portions of the army in England and abroad. It is all the more surprising in the case of Lord Roberts who had held the Irish command. The absence of large annual manœuvres may partly help to explain it.

[2] In other words, only the transport actually required by troops on the battlefield, called by Sir Redvers Buller the "fighting transport," as differentiated from the "subsistence transport," which carried the regimental baggage and rations. On the full Regimental scale an infantry battalion takes with it fourteen vehicles; under the Departmental system nine of these are withdrawn.

waggons,[1] an arrangement which taxed still more severely their already inadequate establishments. In order to make good the deficiencies the units employed at the Remount Depôts were assigned to the field transport; and their places again were temporarily filled by a hastily formed establishment of civilians and natives.

When this reorganisation had been carried out the active army was provided with a number of transport units which, "being self-contained and independent, could be distributed in accordance with the requirements of the military situation, and the duties devolving on the several columns into which the field army was from time to time divided." It was the business of the Director of Supplies, and afterwards of the Director of Transport,[2] Major-General Sir W. G. Nicholson, to see that each column had attached to it an amount of transport commensurate with its size and its duties. He was to be in constant communication with the Deputy Directors of Transport stationed at important centres as the army advanced, with the Director of Transport, Chief Ordnance officer, and Director of Remounts at the Base, and personally in touch with the Director of Supplies at headquarters. Transport officers were to be placed on the staffs of generals commanding, and to be made responsible for the efficiency of the transport attached to the several commands.

It may easily be imagined that so complete an alteration in the method of administration and distribution was not carried out without great friction and strenuous labour. In the field the majority of witnesses agree that the Departmental system was a failure. There

[1] The regimental waggons handed over must have numbered nearly 300. The corps, divisional and brigade, supply columns of an army corps number less than 200.

[2] The division of the transport and supply administration into separate departments is generally admitted to have been a mistake, for sufficiency of supply so closely depends on sufficiency of transport that it is practically impossible to work them apart. The change was made after the loss of the convoy at Waterval. No doubt the pressure of work at that time was unusually great, but it would seem that the formation of two sub-departments under one central authority would have been sufficient to meet the case. Sir Redvers Buller who separated transport and supply, apparently for the same reason as Lord Roberts, on his arrival in South Africa, endeavoured to combine the two by placing them both under the direction of his Chief of the Staff. (See evidence of Colonel Sir W. D. Richardson, Question 3418.)

appears no sufficient reason why, under the Regimental system, elasticity and mobility should not have been obtained; indeed, in the latter part of the war the old method was re-adopted in many of its essential features. During the operations which ended in the capture of Bloemfontein and Pretoria, it does not appear that any great saving of transport was effected by the new arrangement; and Lord Methuen, whose column was the only one to retain the Regimental organisation, always seems to have found it possible, when any temporary necessity for redistribution arose, to withdraw his regimental waggons, and afterwards to return them to the units to which they belonged. Nor is it clear that in the matter of control the advantages gained by the central authorities counterbalanced the great technical difficulties of detailed management resulting from the new system. Although, as Lord Roberts remarks, every effort was made "to keep the mule transport companies with the divisions and brigades to which they were originally allotted," in many, if not in most, cases this was found to be impossible. Even during the advance to Bloemfontein, when most of the principal fighting units remained intact, and when therefore the Departmental system, so far as its internal organisation was concerned, was tried under favourable conditions, the plan of temporarily attaching waggons of the mule companies to the regiments was attended by grave disadvantages. No doubt these were partly due to the fact that most of the men and officers did not understand the system, and also to the want of time to work out many important details. The load-tables, for instance, were incomplete. But the difficulties seem to have been mainly due to the permanent characteristics of the system itself. The large companies did not easily lend themselves to division amongst the various fighting units; and these, as the waggons no longer belonged to them, took no interest in their management. On the other hand, when once they had been separated from their transport companies, the waggons were often unable to find them again. The result was that the fundamental unit almost ceased to exist. In one company not one of its fifty original waggons reached Bloemfontein. Later on, when the operations became more and more widely diffused, the difficulty of keeping the companies together grew still greater.

And this did not merely result in temporary, though serious, inconvenience and delay. It directly affected the efficiency of the companies and their officers. Lord Roberts points out in his memorandum that the departmental officer is a professional as compared with the regimental officer, who, however zealous he may be for the welfare and comfort of the men of his corps and therefore the efficiency of his transport, remains an amateur in the management of animals. But it must be remembered that at the beginning of the campaign many of the officers commanding transport companies were not professionals, and that further it is difficult for any one, be he amateur or professional, to take an interest in drivers, animals, and waggons which are constantly changing hands and, when they pass from his supervision, are likely to be replaced by an inferior batch. When men never knew how long a given set of teams would be under their control, one powerful motive to careful management disappeared. After the arrival at Bloemfontein, the fact that a team of mules "had come through from Modder River" was regarded as a guarantee, not only of their quality, but also of the fact that they had belonged to one company, and had benefited by the extra attention of men who knew them and took an interest in them.[1] This want of fixity of organisation which to a large degree is inherent in the departmental system was certainly accountable for much extra labour on the part of the officers, and much waste of animals, and must be taken into account when the results of their patience and persistency are gauged. No higher compliment can be paid the transport commanders than is conveyed in Lord Roberts's summary of his experience:—" . . . . While I was in South Africa no mishap occurred, nor had any military enterprise to be postponed or abandoned, owing to the transport being inadequate or inefficient."[2]

We may mention here, though this factor in the British successes was in operation long before Lord Roberts reached the Cape, the

[1] The cavalry maintained the Regimental system, with the result that their transport remained in better condition than that of other corps.

[2] It is worth noting that Lord Esher's Committee in Part III. of their Report recommend the Regimental System.

admirable loyalty and the administrative ability shown by the managers and employés of the Cape Railways. "Nothing," writes *The Times* correspondent from Cape Town on January 31st, "could have been more fortunate than that in this Colony, permeated as a great part of it is with a spirit of disaffection, so widespread an organisation as the railway is manned almost entirely by Englishmen." In combination with the already famous Military Director of Railways, Colonel Girouard, and the officers whom he placed as assistants to the local officials at all the important stations, the railway men worked with an energy, patience and skill which merited the great and lasting gratitude of the Empire. Not merely did they contrive on three lines of narrow-gauge railway to forward all the necessary supplies to the constantly increasing masses of men and animals at the front, but they undertook to build troop sidings, to construct armoured trains and gun trucks, to guard and patrol the line against the malevolence of individual rebels, and to execute all large and permanent works, such as the repair of the bridge over the Modder, which want of time prevented the Royal Engineers from performing. The whole of their men, their material, their plant, was placed ungrudgingly at the disposal of the Imperial Army. The regular enginemen drove the trains, and the stationmasters stuck stoutly to their posts when most of the surrounding population had fled southward. The entire arrangements connected with the train service remained in the hands of the civilians; and the military authorities found it possible, contrary to their anticipations, to entrust the conduct of the line up to the most advanced posts, to the ordinary managers. Thanks to Colonel Girouard's system, which placed military officers, corresponding in number and rank to the chief civil officials, at all large centres, just enough of the military element was introduced to ensure a good understanding between soldier and civilian, the former supplying the technical knowledge which the latter could not possess, and the latter doing the work which their intimate knowledge of the railway and its resources enabled them far better than any one else to perform. The military officers could, moreover, enforce the necessary rules for loading and unloading of stores, and entraining and detraining of

troops with an authority which no civilian could exercise, while their practical knowledge of railways enabled them to understand and lessen the difficulties of the officials with which they had to work. Up to the end of January the Western or Kimberley line had carried 47,000 men, 18,000 animals and 37,000 tons of stores, the cost, whatever the nature of the freight, being defrayed at the rate of 7d. per truck per mile; an arrangement which ensured economy of rolling-stock by careful packing, and also helped to keep secret the nature of the goods. In the first months each line transmitted men and stores alike, but after the arrival of Lord Roberts the men and animals were forwarded by the Western, the stores and supplies by the Midland. So good was the arrangement of the service that it was found possible to provide for ordinary passengers as well as meet the demands of the situation. About fifteen military trains left the coast daily for the front, seven from Cape Town, five from Port Elizabeth, and three from East London. The heaviest week's work on the Western line in the first four months of the war was that ending on January 26th, when 7,650 men, 3,535 animals, eleven guns, 799 tons of ordnance, and 1,184 tons of supplies were forwarded to the different points of concentration between the Modder and Orange Rivers.

Meanwhile Lord Roberts's resolution to assume the offensive was strengthened by the news from Natal, where victory seemed to be growing more and more remote. Spion Kop had been followed by Vaal Kranz, and the task of relieving Ladysmith seemed altogether too great for the army on the Tugela. To the Field-Marshal the best chance of improving the situation seemed to lie in a rapid advance into the Free State; several times he expressed the hope that his march would weaken the enemy in Natal, and had even gone so far as to suggest that unless Buller felt fairly confident of success, he should await the development of the main operation. The repeated reverses on the Tugela, therefore, acted as spurs to goad the sides of his intent; and he pushed his preparations on with all possible speed. The view that the advance on Bloemfontein would immediately affect the situation in Natal was not shared by Sir Redvers Buller,[1] and

[1] Letter of February 4th.

although some of the Ladysmith Boers did actually fight at Paardeberg on February 21st, he was certainly right in supposing that a considerable portion of their forces would remain on the Tugela. And it should further be added that Sir Redvers's steady insistence on the necessity of keeping pressure on the besiegers, was of the utmost importance to the town. On the main question, however, Lord Roberts was certainly right. Vigorous action in the Free State was his only means of assisting the army of Natal, and success there might weaken the counsels of Joubert even if it did not at once cause him to reduce his numbers. It must have been with a sense of deep relief that on the evening of February 6th the Field-Marshal and Lord Kitchener slipped out of Cape Town and travelled northward to join the army. On the 8th they reached the Modder. They had been in South Africa just one month.

CHAPTER XII

OPENING OF LORD ROBERTS'S CAMPAIGN—THE RELIEF OF KIMBERLEY

THE EXPEDITION TO KOEDOESBERG—FIRST ATTACK OF DE WET—BOERS REINFORCED—SECOND ATTACK OF DE WET—BOER ARTILLERY IN ACTION—PROGRESS OF THE FIGHT—ARRIVAL AND INACTION OF BABINGTON—WITHDRAWAL OF MACDONALD TO MODDER RIVER—LAST PREPARATIONS OF LORD ROBERTS—HIS PLAN—ORGANISATION OF HIS ARMY—THE CAVALRY DIVISION—MOUNTED INFANTRY ATTACHED TO CAVALRY—NEW BATTALIONS OF MOUNTED INFANTRY—THEIR WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTH—ORGANISATION OF INFANTRY AND FIELD ARTILLERY—CONCENTRATION OF THE ARMY—LORD ROBERTS'S PLAN, BUT NOT THE METHOD OF ITS EXECUTION, DIVINED BY CRONJE—ORDERS TO THE CAVALRY—MARCH TO RAMDAM—COLONEL HANNAY'S ADVANCE—ACTION AT WOLVEKRAAL—WITHDRAWAL OF DE LISLE'S TROOPS—CRONJE'S DISPOSITIONS ON THE 11TH—DE WET SENT TO OPPOSE FRENCH ON THE RIET—FRENCH'S ADVANCE TO THE RIET—FEINT AT WATERVAL—FRENCH MOVES ON DE KIEL'S DRIFT—THE FORD SEIZED—RETREAT OF THE ENEMY—ARRIVAL OF THE 7TH DIVISION—CAVALRY SUPPLY COLUMN DELAYED—ADVANCE OF CAVALRY DIVISION TO THE MODDER—SKIRMISH AT MIDDLEBOSCH—FRENCH'S FEINTS AGAINST KLIP KRAAL DRIFT—SUDDEN MOVEMENT TO KLIP DRIFT—EXHAUSTION OF THE HORSES—KLIP DRIFT SEIZED—WANT OF ARTILLERY—EFFECTS OF THE MARCH—THE 14TH OF FEBRUARY—ARRIVAL OF 6TH DIVISION—CAVALRY ADVANCE ON KIMBERLEY—BRILLIANT TACTICS OF FRENCH—GORDON'S CHARGE—CONTINUATION OF THE MARCH—CAVALRY APPROACH THE TOWN—ACTION OF THE GARRISON—ENTRY OF FRENCH INTO KIMBERLEY—FEBRUARY 16TH FRENCH MOVES NORTH OF KIMBERLEY—GORDON ORDERED TO CUT OFF BOERS RETIRING NORTHWARD—ACTION AT MACFARLANE'S—PORTER DELAYED AT DRONFIELD—FINAL ACTION AT DRONFIELD—RETIREMENT OF CAVALRY DIVISION TO KIMBERLEY—EXHAUSTION OF HORSES—REPORTS OF CRONJE'S RETREAT—KITCHENER'S MESSAGE—FRENCH STARTS FOR THE MODDER

WHILE Lord Roberts was travelling up from Capetown to take command of the army a subordinate operation was in progress on Methuen's left. Since the day of Sunnyside no expedition had been made on the west of the railway; and with the exception of a weak post of Rimington's Guides on the Vetberg there was nothing to set bounds to the movements of the rebel parties or to prevent their constant communication with Cronje. On February 2nd, however, Lord Roberts, having received reports that the enemy were within a few miles of the line, ordered the temporary occupation of Koedoesberg Drift, twenty miles from Modder Camp, with the double

object of cutting off the raiders from Magersfontein and deceiving the Boer general as to the direction of his intended movement. At the same time a force of cavalry and mounted infantry under Colonel Broadwood was to march from Orange River station towards Sunnyside, so as to drive the Boers south of the Riet back upon the Koedoesberg column or upon Douglas. At this period Koedoesberg appears to have been regarded as the only practicable drift on this part of the Riet; although, as a matter of fact, Painter's Drift was also easily passable.

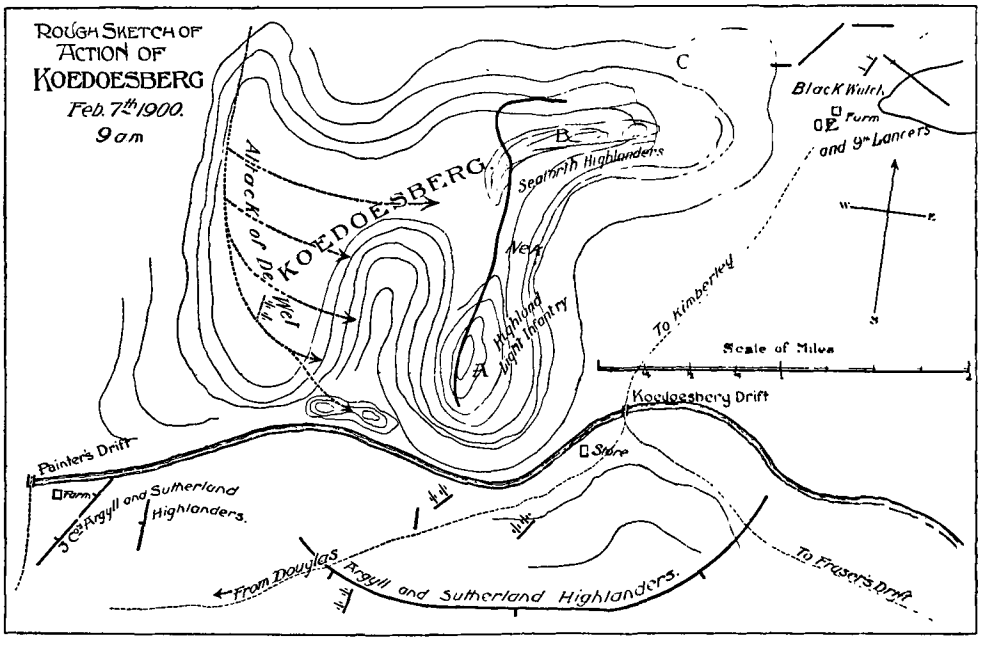
The troops selected for the undertaking were the Highland Brigade, now under the command of Major-General Macdonald, two squadrons of that well-tried regiment the 9th Lancers, the 62nd field battery and the 7th field company of Royal Engineers. The march began at dawn on the morning of the 3rd. As the weather was hot, and there was no particular need of haste, the force halted at Fraser's Farm, about half-way to Koedoesberg, and did not reach the drift until 2 p.m. on the following afternoon, after a march which tried the infantry severely.[1] A few Boers exchanged shots with the cavalry and then retired northwards, leaving the passage in their hands. The only infantry who crossed the river that day were two companies of the Highland Light Infantry, who were entrusted with the construction of a small field redoubt to guard the drift. The rest of the brigade and the field battery bivouacked on the south bank.

It was fortunate that the enemy were not in sufficient strength to occupy the Koedoesberg during the night, for the hill was within infantry range of the ford, and even a few rifles could have made a crossing difficult and costly. It would have been safer to occupy it as soon as the force arrived; and but for lack of water and the great extent of the position this would no doubt have been done. The main plateau sweeps round from the river in a north-easterly direction, rising at its extremities into lofty eminences (A B in map), and prolonging itself to the eastward in a series of lower hillocks (C). From north to south

[1] This march of about thirteen miles took, including halts, no less than seven hours. The heat and dust clouds proved very exhausting, many men fell out and one died of sunstroke. The column did not start till 7 a.m., and so had to march when the sun was at its hottest.

its length is about two miles; its sides are steep and covered with scrub; its crest strewn with ironstone boulders. From its lower and western portion it is divided at its southern end by a deep gorge about a thousand yards across. The entire ridge, measured from east to west, is about two miles in diameter, its south-western flanks stretching down in sandy spurs towards Painter's Drift, some three miles below the British bivouac. The southern bank of the Riet is commanded by the plateau at both these points.

At daybreak on the 5th cavalry patrols reported the presence of



Boers on the hill, and the intended working party, two companies of the Highland Light Infantry and one of the Black Watch, at the moment the only infantry on the north bank, were at once sent up on to A and B. They arrived in time to prevent the enemy from reaching the eastern edge, and began building sangars. All was quiet until 2 p.m., when a patrol galloped in to report that a large force of Boers were approaching. Reinforcements were now ordered up, three companies of the Highland Light Infantry going to A, two companies of the Black Watch to B, and another company to C, then occupied by the

original working party of the same regiment. At 4 p.m. a very hot rifle fire broke out along the main position. De Wet, who had watched Macdonald's movement from the hills of Spytfontein, had arrived with 350 men, and immediately proceeded to attack. But in face of a severe fire from the sangars his burghers could gain no ground, and at nightfall he was obliged to retire to find water and await reinforcements.

Next morning Macdonald prepared to clear the hill, and sent half the Highland Light Infantry round its southern and western sides with orders to fall on the flank of the enemy if they again attempted to attack by way of the plateau. But only a few mounted Boers were seen, and the troops climbed the hill unmolested and joined the men in the sangars. By this time a rough wall had been built between A to B so as to command the gorge and plateau to the west. The flanking posts at C guarded the right rear of the position, which was still further protected by two guns and seven companies of the Black Watch entrenched to north of the Farm (E). That evening four companies of the Seaforth Highlanders took over the defences on the main hill, the Argyll and Sutherland and four guns remaining on the south bank with General Macdonald. The position was a strong one, but it possessed the grave disadvantage that no suitable place for artillery could be found on the plateau.

No fighting had taken place on the 6th, but large bodies of Boers were seen in movement from Spytfontein, and it is probable that the enemy were actually on the northern and western sides of the hill during the night. At daybreak on the 7th they again advanced and poured a heavy fire upon the stone breastworks, then held by eight companies of the Seaforths and Highland Light Infantry. At 7.30 a.m., as the firing grew heavier, Colonel Hughes Hallett of the Seaforths was ordered to take command of the troops on the northern bank, on the understanding that half the Highland Light Infantry might be required to act with General Macdonald, and that half the Black Watch were to remain entrenched at the Farm. The force available for the defence of the hill was therefore reduced to a strength of two battalions.

At 9 a.m. the two guns which had been sent at De Wet's request suddenly opened an effective fire from beyond the ravine upon the sangars at A. At the short range of 1,600 yards the fire of these pieces, which were commanded by Albrecht, was very accurate; and their shells made several direct hits on the sangers, sending the rock-splinters and boulders flying in all directions, and killing and wounding not a few men. Luckily the British guns on the south bank soon came into action, and guided by signallers on A managed by indirect fire to hold down the shell fire of the enemy, several times forcing their guns to change position.[1]

But, under cover of their artillery fire, the Boer riflemen had now crept up to within easy range of the wall, and concentrated upon it an extremely hot fire, inflicting some loss upon the Seaforth companies and ultimately necessitating the withdrawl of a few men behind the shelter of the hill crest. At 11 a.m. Major Berkeley, of the Black Watch, reinforced A with two companies of his regiment; and half an hour later Major Maxwell with two more companies went up to the support of the companies on B. The rest of the Seaforth Highlanders were then withdrawn under cover of the Nek, the four companies of the Highland Light Infantry remaining on the hill. About the same time General Macdonald, impressed with the vigour and numbers of the enemy, demanded reinforcements from Modder River; and a cavalry brigade with two batteries of horse artillery, which had been held in readiness under General Babington, moved out along the north bank to his support.[2]

All through the morning the fighting continued; and although the enemy made no progress on the hill itself, Froneman, De Wet's lieutenant, succeeded in working his way down the gorge under a heavy fire from the British left at A, and reached some low hillocks near the river bank. Here, however, he was checked by the fire of

[1] De Wet states that his Krupp guns drove the four British guns on the south bank across the river to take shelter behind the mountain. There is no foundation whatever for this statement; in fact, the exact contrary was the case, as Albrecht himself afterwards admitted.

[2] The composition of this brigade was as follows: One squadron each of the Scots Greys, 10th Hussars and 12th Lancers, and the whole of the 16th Lancers.

the 62nd Battery; and from that time the vigour of the attack began to abate. Fresh companies of the Seaforths and Highland Light Infantry began to advance along the southern flank of the berg, threatening the enemy's right; and in front of the central sangars their riflemen could gain no ground. Seeing this, Colonel Hughes Hallett prepared to take the offensive, and sent orders to the Black Watch on B to attack in force across the plateau as soon as the cavalry brigade was in a position to co-operate from the north and east. At 4.30 p.m. Babington appeared, and driving back some eighty Boers which De Wet had posted to cover his left and rear, threatened to cut him off altogether. Instead, however, of pushing on, the commander of the cavalry seems to have waited for instructions, with the result that De Wet was enabled to collect a few men and gain a rise in the plain from which he could cover his line of retreat. Before anything was done the evening had closed in; and during the night the Boer leader was able to extricate himself safely from a position which more vigorous action on the part of the cavalry might have rendered fatal.

On the south side of the river the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had been mainly occupied in guarding the drift and bivouacs; but the descent of a party of the enemy on Painter's Drift gave opportunity for a brisk skirmish, three companies of that regiment and two guns clearing the Boers from the farm buildings, and driving them on to the north bank. By nightfall the enemy had been beaten off at every point. Our losses during this action included three officers, Captain Eykyn and Lieutenant Tait of the Black Watch and Captain Blair of the Seaforth Highlanders, and ten men killed, four officers and sixty-five men wounded. The Boer losses probably did not exceed thirty.[1]

At dawn next morning the infantry reconnoitred the entire hill without meeting any resistance. Nothing was to be seen of the main Boer force, although from De Wet's own account it is evident that it was not far off. It seems that Lord Roberts had at first con-

[1] De Wet only admits a loss of two men killed and seven wounded. On the other hand, six new graves were seen on the hill by our troops on the following day, and it is quite likely that others were overlooked. It was afterwards reported that the enemy had lost considerably.

templated holding the river passage permanently; and so far as the expedition is to be regarded as a feint against Cronje's right, it was certainly desirable that the column should hold on until the main operation was in progress. But the position was a large one, and to hold it with safety would have required more men than could have been spared. Lord Kitchener therefore ordered General Macdonald to retire, all the more readily, perhaps, because Colonel Broadwood, who had reached Sunnyside on the 5th, found that the Boers in that neighbourhood had retired upon Douglas, and that all hope of driving them into the arms of Macdonald was at an end. The troops were withdrawn during the day to the south bank, and marching by night reached Fraser's Farm at two o'clock on the morning of the 9th. Here they spent the day, and starting in the cool of the afternoon reached Modder Camp on the same evening; there to be greeted by the Commander-in-Chief, who was now superintending the final concentration of his army.

With the same energy with which he had attacked the question of transport but with happier results, Lord Roberts had addressed himself to the organisation of the force which was to execute his scheme. For the first time in the war, partly, no doubt, owing to the greater resources available, we find the principle of the employment of mass brought into play. In General French he had a cavalry leader of far more than ordinary capacity, and under his command, abandoning the ordinary army-corps organisation, he placed every squadron of regular cavalry, every battery of horse artillery, and some of the best of the mounted infantry. The Cavalry Division was organised in three brigades, [1] and accompanied by seven batteries of

[1] *1st Brigade*—O.C., Lieut.-Colonel Alexander (in the absence of Colonel Porter):

	State attached to Lord Roberts's Despatch No. 2.	Strength on leaving Modder (Approximate).
2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys)	438	
6th Dragoons (Inniskillings—1 squadron)	150	
New South Wales Lancers	150	1,100?
6th Dragoon Guards (Carabineers) *	464	
14th Hussars (1 squadron) *	164	
	1,386	

* Joined at Klip Drift.

horse artillery. This powerful mass cannot, however, be said to have possessed all the advantages which are usually to be inferred from its title. The brigades had not been worked together, the staffs were in some cases incomplete; and there was no representative of the Horse

Royal Horse Artillery—Lieut.-Colonel Rochfort—Q, T, U Batteries ... 18 guns.

2nd Brigade—Lieut.-Colonel Broadwood:

10th Hussars	458	...	...	400
Household Composite Regiment	625	...	...	400
12th Lancers	500	...	horses	385
	1,583			1,185

Royal Horse Artillery—Lieut.-Colonel Davidson—G, P Batteries ... ... 12 guns.

3rd Brigade—Lieut.-Colonel Gordon:

9th Lancers	418	...	...	900?
16th Lancers	540			
	958			

Royal Horse Artillery—Lieut.-Colonel Eustace—R, O Batteries ... ... 12 guns.

Mounted Infantry attached to Cavalry Division—O.C., Lieut.-Colonel Alderson:

1st Regiment—Lieut.-Colonel Alderson	413	...	...	400
3rd Regiment—Lieut.-Colonel Pilcher	460	...	...	280
Colonials—Roberts's Horse	550	...	...	550
Rimington's Guides	150	...	...	100
Queensland Mounted Infantry	275	...	...	220
Kitchener's Horse *	...	...	...	200
New Zealand Mounted Rifles *	...	...	...	220
	1,848			1,970

The initial strength of the Cavalry Division is differently given. Mr. Goldmann places it at 2,754 of all ranks and 2,871 horses: some "Notes from the Diary of a Distinguished Officer," quoted by Mr. Bennet Burleigh, give a total of 2,664 Cavalrymen; Mounted Infantry and Colonials, 1,268. The German Staff history gives in an appendix a table of the strength of the different regiments, resulting as follows:—

	All Ranks.		Horses.
Cavalry	3,721	...	3,646
Horse Artillery	1,315	...	1,401
Mounted Infantry and Colonials (exclusive of Kitchener's Horse	1,415	...	?
	6,451		5,047

These last totals, no doubt, include non-combatants.

* Joined at Klip Drift.

Artillery on the Divisional Staff. Moreover, hardly any of the regiments had been in the country more than two months; and the horses were not only insufficiently acclimatised, but were suffering from the effects of hard work following on a long sea voyage. The same may be said of G, P, O, and R batteries. Q, T, and U were still worse off, for the latter had only reached Capetown on January 10th, and Q and T, owing to the breakdown of their transport, did not arrive until January 26th. They had in no way recovered from a 38 days' voyage, and were unfit for strenuous and continued exertion.

The mounted infantry which were to accompany the cavalry were of unequal quality, but in Lieut.-Colonel Alderson they possessed a sound and experienced commander who had already seen active service in South Africa. The 1st Mounted Infantry Regiment was formed of companies which had been specially trained at Aldershot and had taken part in active operations at Sterkstroom and elsewhere. The 3rd Mounted Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Pilcher, was also composed of trained men who had mainly belonged to the so-called "local mounted infantry"[1] and had seen hard fighting with Methuen. Rimington's Guides, though few in number, were a fine, capable body of men, originally chosen for their knowledge of the country and now hardened and disciplined by months of constant and arduous work between the Orange and Modder Rivers. The Queenslanders and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles were among the very best of the over-sea Colonials. Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse come in a different category. They were partly commanded by British officers, and in men like Captain Majendie, of the Rifle Brigade, had excellent leaders. But their *personnel* was uneven in quality, and in both corps, but especially in Kitchener's Horse, the discipline was weak and the riding was bad. This was mainly due to the fact that the corps had scarcely been organised a month before they were sent into the field; and there is much force in the argument that it would have been better to keep them on the lines of communications until they were really fit for work, and to utilise their horses as remounts for the Cavalry Division. Considered as a

[1] Companies formed from battalions quartered in South Africa before the war.

whole, however, the Cavalry Division and its attendant Mounted Infantry formed one of the most powerful bodies of horsemen that the British army has ever placed in the field; and in General French it had a commander who was thoroughly equal to the arduous duties of leader.

But a further increase of the mounted troops was absolutely necessary; and Lord Roberts was forced to adopt the bold expedient of forming additional regiments of mounted infantry with men drawn from the infantry battalions, each battalion furnishing about 100 men and officers.[1] Two of these regiments, the 9th and 10th, remained at Sterkstroom and Colesberg; the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th, were formed at Orange River Station, and together with the 2nd, originally organised at Aldershot, put under the command of Colonel Hannay.

That the experiment should have succeeded as well as it did says much for the willingness of the men and the patience of the officers. But what the new battalions were able to achieve, furnishes no criterion of what can be done by mounted infantry when properly trained and organised. The order for their formation was not issued until January 15th; within less than four weeks they had to take the field.[2] Few of the officers had any experience of mounted duties, and probably not 20 per cent. of the men had ever been on horseback in their lives. To make matters still worse, their mounts were such as would have tried the skill and care which is demanded, and not always obtained, from trained cavalrymen. A large proportion were Argentines, in very soft condition, many of them absolutely unbroken. These disadvantages were often heightened by the unsuitability of the available saddles, the weight of unnecessary articles, and the want of necessary ones. Moreover, owing to the small number of waggons allowed with the first line transport, the supply of forage was often insufficient.

[1] The Guards furnished no mounted infantry. In some cases the contingents consisted of selected men; in most one entire company was given over. Hence many of the infantry battalions went into action with only seven companies.

[2] Some of the infantry had even less time to learn their work. The King's Own Scottish Borderer Company of the 7th Regiment, for instance, did not receive its mounts till February 1st, having only arrived at Capetown five days before.

It was inevitable under these conditions that the mobility of the corps should suffer greatly in the very first marches. And these drawbacks did not merely affect the mobility and material well-being of the new units. The fact is undoubted that the putting of infantrymen on horseback and their employment on tasks to which they were unaccustomed resulted at first in a serious loss of *morale* and considerably lessened their fighting efficiency. On several occasions early in the campaign it was noticed that the behaviour of a company of mounted infantry alongside or near the infantry battalion from which the men composing it had been drawn, compared very unfavourably with that of the rest of its old corps. While the latter behaved with the traditional bravery and dash of British troops, the mounted infantry were seen to hang back, or give ground, in a manner strange to those who best knew and appreciated the qualities of the English soldier. This temporary inferiority must be taken into account when the performances of the mounted infantry and of its leaders are judged. But it did not altogether neutralise, even in their early days, the value of the new corps. Unavoidably wasteful as was the system under which they learnt their trade, these 3,000 half-trained men liberated the whole of the cavalry and the best of the Colonials for special work, and under experienced leaders rendered independent services of great importance. Nor was their inefficiency of long duration. Their previously acquired discipline soon made itself felt, and by the end of the war, in the opinion of many qualified to judge, they had become the most formidable mounted troops in South Africa.[1]

The infantry of Lord Roberts's active army consisted of the 6th,

[1] The following extract from a letter quoted by Dr. Miller Maquire in the *United Services Magazine* of March, 1904, may be of interest:—

"Four companies taken from four different battalions formed a mounted infantry battalion, a commanding officer from one regiment, an adjutant from another, no proper quartermaster nor serjeant-major—nothing in fact in the shape of a staff. When they first went into action the men—not through any want of keenness, but from want of proper organisation—straggled all over the place. I do not think I am exaggerating when I say 25 per cent. of them never got into the firing line. As for the wastage in horseflesh, due both to ignorance and imperfect supervision owing to lack of organisation, it was simply wicked."

7th, and 9th Divisions,[1] under Lieut.-Generals Kelly-Kenny, Tucker,

The eight regiments of mounted infantry who took part in the advance to Bloemfontein were thus composed:—

1ST BATTALION.	2ND BATTALION.	3RD BATTALION.	4TH BATTALION.
Lieut.-Col. Alderson.	*Lieut.-Col. Martyr.*	*Lieut.-Col. Pilcher.*	*Lieut.-Col. Henry.*
South-Eastern Co.	Eastern Co.	Northumberland Fus. Co.	Duke of Cornwall's L.I. Co.
Cork Co.	Western Co.	Loyal N. Lancs. Co.	Shropshire L.I. Co.
Aldershot Co.	Northern Co.	Northamptonshire Co.	Yorkshire Regt. Co.
Southern Co.	Dublin Co.	K.O.Y.L.I. Co.	Warwick Regt. Co.
		Munster Fus. Co.	

5TH BATTALION.	6TH BATTALION.	7TH BATTALION.	8TH BATTALION.
Major Hatchell.	*Lieut.-Col. De Lisle.*	*Lieut.-Col. Bainbridge.*	*Lieut.-Col. Ross.*
Worcester Co.	Wiltshire Co.	Norfolk Co.	Cheshire Co.
R. Irish Co.	Gordon Highlanders Co.	Lincoln Co.	E. Lancs. Co.
East Kent Co.	Bedfordshire Co.	Scotch Borderers Co.	S.W. Borderers Co.
Glo'ster Co.	Essex Regt. Co.	Hampshire Co.	N. Stafford Co.
	Welsh Regt. Co.		1st West Ridings Co.
			1st Oxford I. Co.

Their numbers on leaving Orange River were approximately as follows:—

1st Battalion	... ...	400
2nd ,,	... ...	440
3rd ,,	... ...	280
4th ,,	... ...	450
5th ,,	... ...	430
6th ,,	... ...	460
7th ,,	... ...	450
8th ,,	... ...	250
		3,160

The 3rd and 8th Battalions were weakened by detachments. The number of riflemen, exclusive of horse holders, that the eight battalions could put in the firing-line probably did not exceed 2,000.

[1] The infantry were thus organised:—

1st Division—LIEUT.-GEN. LORD METHUEN.

1st Brigade—Major-General Pole-Carew.

3,054
- 3rd Grenadier Guards.
- 1st Coldstream ,,
- 2nd ,, ,,
- 1st Scots ,,

9th Brigade—Colonel E. Douglas.

2,754
- 1st Northumberland Fusiliers.
- 1st Loyal North Lancs.
- 2nd Northamptonshire.
- 2nd K.O. Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Royal Engineers—17th Field Co.

6th Division—LIEUT.-GEN. KELLY KENNY.

13th Brigade—Major-General Knox.

2,885
- 2nd East Kent.
- 2nd Gloucestershire.
- 1st West Riding Regt.
- 1st Oxford Light Infantry.

18th Brigade—Brig.-Gen. T. E. Stephenson.

3,543
- 2nd Royal Warwicks.
- 1st Yorkshire Regiment.
- 1st Essex ,,
- 1st Welsh ,,

38th Field Co.

and Colvile. The 1st Division with the 20th and 38th Field Batteries remained with Lord Methuen in front of Magersfontein. His old Brigade Division of field artillery, the 18th, 62nd and 75th Batteries under Colonel Hall, was handed over to the 7th Division; the 6th was accompanied by the 76th and 81st, under Colonel Macdonell. The 9th Division had at first no artillery specially allotted to it, but it took charge of part of the Naval Brigade,[1] the 82nd Field Battery, and the 65th Howitzer Battery.[2] Later on the artillery was strengthened by Lieut.-Colonel Flint's Brigade Division, consisting of the 83rd, 84th, and 85th Field Batteries. At the start, including Lord Methuen's force, Lord Roberts brought into the field 96 field and horse guns and howitzers, and eight Naval guns, about 7,500 mounted troops, and nearly 26,000 infantry and engineers. Including Army Service Corps and non-combatants, the grand total must have reached nearly 40,000 men.[3]

The concentration of this mass had been begun in the last days of January; and thenceforward the accumulation of troops and stores between the Orange and Modder Rivers was continuous. On the 30th began the transport of the 13th Infantry Brigade from Thebus, and that of French's cavalry from Naauwpoort. Every endeavour was made to

7th Division—LIEUT.-GENERAL TUCKER.

14th Brigade—Major-General Sir H. Chermside.

3,322
- 2nd Norfolk Regiment.
- 2nd Linconshire.
- 2nd Hampshire.
- 1st K.O.S.B.

15th Brigade—Major-General Wavell.

3,601
- 2nd Cheshire Regiment.
- 1st East Lancashire.
- 2nd South Wales Borderers.
- 2nd North Staffordshire.

Royal Engineers—9th Field Co.

9th Division—LIEUT.-GENERAL COLVILE.

3rd Brigade—Major-General Macdonald.

3,121
- 2nd Black Watch.
- 1st Highland Light Infantry.
- 2nd Seaforth Highlanders.
- 1st Bat. Argyll and Sutherland.

19th Brigade—Major-Gen. Smith-Dorrien.

3,547
- 1st Gordon Highlanders.
- 2nd Duke of Cornwall's L.I.
- 2nd Shropshire L.I.
- Royal Canadian Regiment.

[1] The Naval Brigade consisted in all of four 4·7-in. guns and four 12-pounders.

[2] The 37th Howitzer Battery is reckoned amongst Lord Roberts's available artillery in the State of "Troops selected for the relief of Kimberley." It was sent to join the force round Colesberg.

[3] The German Staff History states that the ration strength up to the time of Cronje's surrender was roughly 40,000 men and 15,000 horses.

conceal the objects of these movements. False reports of the massing of troops behind Naauwpoort were published in the newspapers; bogus telegrams were placarded in the railway stations. Clements remained in position at Colesberg, and the Commander-in-Chief still stayed at Capetown. In the army itself not even the divisional generals had any knowledge of his real intentions. But the collection of great quantities of transport at the Orange River Station was quite sufficient to indicate to the enemy the intended starting-point of the movement; and in spite of the echeloning of the army in positions which threatened Bloemfontein rather than Kimberley, the belief became general in the Boer camps that the army would first attempt the relief of the town. A week before the march began Cronje had come to the conclusion that the blow would be aimed at himself. The feint at Koedoesberg must have strengthened this opinion; but the Boer General was far from grasping the real design of his opponent, although Albrecht, Villebois De Mareuil, and other foreign officers serving under him had already become uneasy as to his left, and strove hard to persuade him that the attack would not be a frontal one. But Cronje persisted in believing that no large British force could leave the railway; and under that delusion he laboured until the end.

Day by day the storm that was so soon to burst gathered along the line of the railway. On February 6th the 6th and 7th Divisions were ordered to concentrate, the first at Modder, the second between Orange River and Belmont. On February 8th, the day of Lord Roberts's arrival, the organisation of the Cavalry and Mounted Infantry was given out; and a secret memorandum on the country south of the Riet and between the Riet and Modder was sent to the principal officers. The advance would have begun on the next day had it not been thought advisable to give the cavalry which had been at Koedoesberg twenty-four hours' rest before they started. On the morning of the 9th General French warned the officers commanding cavalry regiments to prepare to accompany a flying column to be away for five days; on the same day the 14th Brigade reached Enslin, the 15th Graspan; and in the evening Hannay, with a strong force of cavalry and mounted infantry, marched north-east from the Orange River Bridge. Next morning at 7 a.m.

General French issued his final orders. The cavalry were to take five days' supplies for horses, six for men; 200 rounds per carbine were to be carried on man and horse; 400 rounds per gun in the waggons and transport; the column was to be accompanied by 5 per cent. led horses without saddles. Any brigades and brigade staffs which were still incomplete were to be made up on the march.

The same afternoon Lord Roberts called together the officers commanding cavalry regiments, and told them that Kimberley was in great straits,[1] and would have to be relieved in the next five days. They were to push on with all possible speed; he would follow them with the infantry as rapidly as he could; and he hoped that if a chance presented itself they would not fail to inflict heavy punishment on the enemy. They were the most numerous body of British cavalry that had ever entered the field as a single unit, "they were to get the greatest chance that cavalry had ever had," and he looked to them to maintain the high traditions of their arm. "You must relieve Kimberley," he concluded, "if it costs you half your forces." At the same time General French received secret instructions to intercept the retirement of the Boer army, and, if possible, to capture its baggage and heavy artillery.

To the student of war as well as to the participating soldiers, the commencement of a great strategic movement is perhaps the most thrilling moment of a campaign. The transition from inactivity to swift motion, the sudden tightening of the muscles of an army, the apparently irresistible energy of the advancing masses, the secret but vehement rush into the unknown, affect the mind with a sense of mystery and power, and give to the opening marches of a great host a material grandeur which attaches to no other form of human activity. With all the feelings of hope, strength, and freedom with which troops

[1] Mr. Rhodes's message had evidently reached him. In his evidence before the Commission appointed to inquire into the care of the sick and wounded he stated that he had been informed that Kimberley could not hold out beyond the 17th of February (12686). On January 26th he wrote to Sir Redvers Buller that Kimberley could easily hold out till the end of the month. It is evident that he received the lower estimate of the town's power of resistance after reaching the Modder. From what source it came he did not state. Certainly it did not come from Colonel Kekewich.

long held in leash spring forward at their leader's command along the path which is to lead to the decisive encounter, the Cavalry Division moved out of Modder Camp at 2 a.m. on February 11th, and turned southwards along the road to Ramdam.

The broad lines of Lord Roberts's plan were simple enough. Pivoting on Methuen, whose force would act as a screen to cover the movement, he had determined to push the cavalry round Cronje's left flank, to seize, by a swift and wide sweep, the drifts of the Riet and Modder and so threaten that general's line of communication with Bloemfontein. The infantry were to follow in the track of French, occupying the river passages behind him. As soon as a sufficient force had reached the Modder the cavalry were again to advance and join hands with the Kimberley garrison. The wide circuit, of which the march to Ramdam was the opening portion, was necessary in order to keep Cronje in the dark as to the real intentions of the British General, and to place the striking force well outside his flank before he could divine the plan of attack. The movement utilised to the fullest extent the position of Methuen's force; and might appear either a mere repetition of the raids of the preceding month or, taken in conjunction with Colonel Hannay's advance to Ramah, the beginning of a march on Bloemfontein.

By 10 a.m. the great mass of men and horses had reached Ramdam, "a typical Free State homestead," with its wells and waterpans, and its little block of whitewashed, iron-roofed buildings, outhouses, and cattle kraals. About the same time the 7th Division, which had started at four o'clock from Graspan and Enslin, also marched in, the men suffering severely from heat and thirst, and falling out in large numbers. A little later Colonel Gordon, who had come straight from India, arrived and took command of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade; and at 7 p.m. came Colonel Broadwood with a squadron of the Scots Greys and Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse. By midnight, with the exception of Colonel Porter and the cavalry with Colonel Hannay, General French's command was complete. The horsemen bivouacked in rear of the infantry, the outposts of the latter covering the dams and facing towards the east.

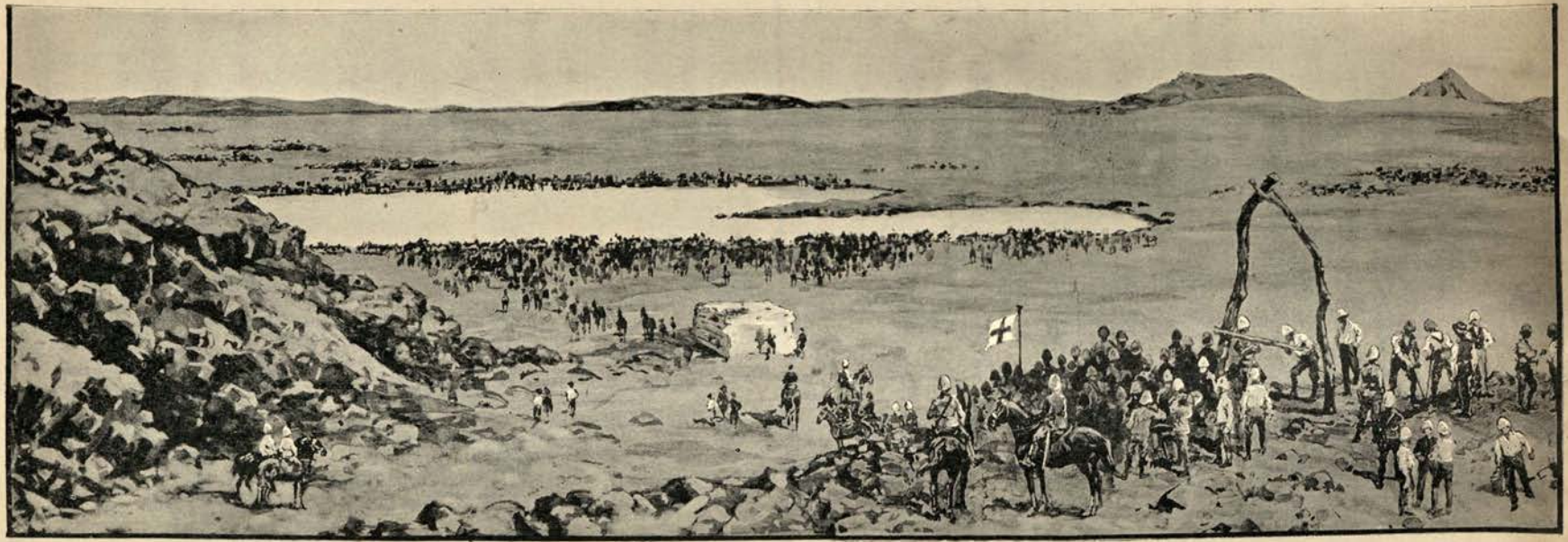
While French was moving to Ramdam, Colonel Hannay's column was already in action. On the evening of the 9th, five of the newly organised battalions with a body of Colonials and four-and-a-half squadrons of cavalry [1] left Orange River Station and about midnight arrived at Ramah Spring, whither they had been preceded on the day before by the New South Wales Mounted Infantry. It was intended that Hannay should devote the next day to driving a body of the enemy, estimated at 150, from Wolvekraal, a few miles to the eastward, and should reach Ramdam on the 12th, thus helping to cover the right flank of the army, and making a show of moving on Fauresmith. Accordingly, on the evening of the 10th, he ordered a force [2] under De Lisle to reconnoitre the Wolvekraal kopjes, and, if possible, to push through the hills without wasting time in manœuvring. He himself, with the main body, would move on the left of De Lisle, who was to report at 8 a.m. The baggage, escorted by the 4th Mounted Infantry, was to follow on the extreme left or inner flank by a track leading northwards from Ramah Spring.

Next morning De Lisle moved as he had been directed and came in touch with the enemy at 6.45 a.m. The Boers held a position of great strength consisting of a line of steep kopjes commanding a plain a mile and a half broad. In this plain lay Wolvekraal Farm; and the road which De Lisle had been following ran through it and over the nek held by the enemy. Seeing that to attack him without artillery would merely have resulted in useless waste of life De Lisle, whose advanced

[1] Colonel Hannay's force was composed as follows:—

6th, 5th, 2nd, 4th, 7th, Mounted Infantry Regiments	2,100
The New Zealand Mounted Rifles	220
New South Wales Mounted Infantry	120
Detachment of Rimington's Guides	40
Kitchener's Horse (2 squadrons)	200
6th Dragoon Guards	400
14th Hussars (1 squadron)	150
Inniskillings (detachment with 2 Maxims)	70
	3,310

[2] Rimington's Guides, two Maxims, 6th and 5th Mounted Infantry, and New Zealand Mounted Rifles.



RAMDAM.

regiment, the 6th Mounted Infantry, was now extended over a very wide front, gave orders that no one should approach closer than 1,200 or 1,000 yards, and reported the situation to Hannay. In the meantime the New Zealanders and the New South Wales Mounted Infantry came up on the right and left of the 6th Mounted Infantry, and the 5th Regiment moved in support.

The message reached Hannay about 8 a.m. Unacquainted with the ground, and doubtless under the impression that the Boers were few in number, the Colonel repeated his original instructions, *i.e.*, that his subordinate was to push on; and himself undertook to attack the enemy's right flank and rear on the hills north of the main position. At about 8.30 a.m. he began moving a company of the 2nd Mounted Infantry to his right, and shortly afterwards supported it with the rest of Colonel Martyr's Regiment and Kitchener's Horse. Had this movement been pressed it would probably have compelled the enemy to retreat; but before it could be carried out a second message arrived from De Lisle emphasising once more the great strength of the enemy's position and the certain costliness of an attack. After a personal reconnaissance Hannay concurred in this view, directed De Lisle to withdraw his men, and sent word to Martyr that he was to advance no further. At the same time he ordered the cavalry and the baggage column to push on to Roodepan, which was safely reached in the course of the afternoon.

De Lisle's retirement was less easy. During the early hours of the morning the whole of his column had become engaged, the New South Wales Company on the left of the 6th Mounted Infantry, the 5th Mounted Infantry on the extreme right, the New Zealanders slightly in rear of the interval between the 5th and 6th; and by 9.30 a.m., although it had not been intended to press the attack, the Bedfordshire Company on the right of the 6th Mounted Infantry together with most of the 5th were within 400 yards of the hostile positions and under a very heavy fire. The enemy had now brought up a gun, which enfiladed the line of the 6th and 5th Mounted Infantry and inflicted some loss amongst the horses in rear. Luckily the Boer shells failed to burst properly, and in spite of the heavy fire the bulk of De Lisle's force succeeded in retiring to a hollow out of range. But

the Bedfordshire Company and the Company of the Buffs on the right wing had received no order to retire, and so great was the extent of ground covered by the fighting front that their absence was not discovered until the remainder were in safety. In order to extricate them a second advance was necessary, and it was late in the afternoon before they were withdrawn. They had sustained the brunt of the enemy's fire [1] for some hours and had lost eighteen men missing besides killed and wounded.[2] De Lisle's column then made its way to Roodepan, the Boers, numbering 226 men under Commandant de Poste, retiring towards the north-east. No pursuit was, or under the circumstances perhaps could be, attempted, so that all touch with the enemy was immediately lost; and it is exceedingly probable that they remained in the neighbourhood and afterwards shared in De Wet's capture of the convoy at Waterval. De Lisle joined Hannay shortly before midnight, his men and horses in a very exhausted condition. The action is chiefly remarkable as an illustration of the impossibility of anticipating the course of an operation by detailed orders, and of the difficulty of maintaining direct control over troops after fighting has begun; a difficulty, it may be added, which was greatly aggravated by the extreme rawness of the Mounted Infantry.

Colonel Hannay's further movements form part of the history of the infantry. Before his tired troops left Roodepan, French had already started for the Riet, the first serious obstacle that intervened between him and Kimberley, and the first line that the enemy would be likely to contest.

Cronje had been informed of the movement of a large body of

[1] During the fight, when the British troops were suffering greatly from thirst, a small party began to work their way towards a pan of water. A number of Boers who were within easy range ceased firing and allowed them to drink without molestation, only reopening fire when they had returned to their positions.

[2] The losses of the column were borne by the 5th and 6th Mounted Infantry:—

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
5th Mounted Infantry ...	0	6	9	15
6th Mounted Infantry ...	4	23	14	41
	4	29	23	56

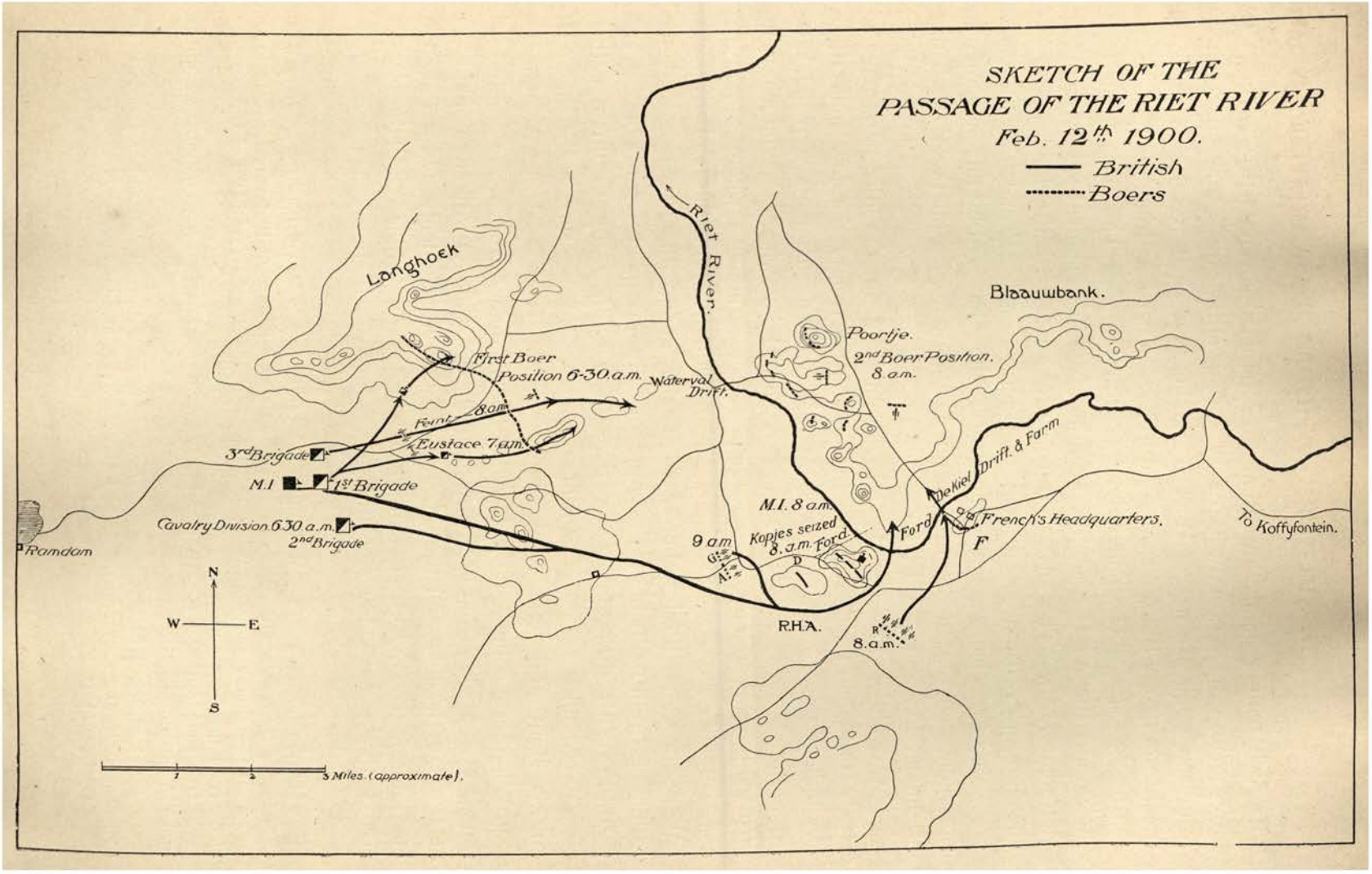
English troops in the direction of Koffyfontein, and had sent out De Wet with 450 men, a Krupp and a Maxim Nordenfeldt "to drive back the enemy." By dawn on the 12th, that vigorous leader was himself approaching the right bank of the Riet at Blaauwbank, near De Kiel's Drift, and had sent a detachment with a gun on to the opposite bank to occupy the kopjes that overlook the crossing at Waterval. So placed he was able to observe the movements of the British cavalry and the roads leading to the north and east.

French, who had reconnoitered in the direction of the river on the preceding afternoon, was fully prepared for resistance. He expected that the Riet Drifts would be closely watched if not actually defended, and to avoid the loss of life that would certainly occur if the passages had to be directly forced, he had resolved to distract the enemy's attention by feints before making his real effort. The ground, which was considerably broken, favoured his preparatory movements. The rest he trusted to the mobility of his squadrons.

Colonel Gordon's Brigade (3rd), on the left, was to reconnoitre Waterval Drift, and, if he found it undefended, to cross and hold the approaches; if defended, he was only to demonstrate. Colonel Broadwood (2nd), on the right, was to reconnoitre De Kiel's Drift and then push on some miles to the eastwards; he also was to threaten to cross if opposed or watched. The central column, composed of Alexander's Brigade (1st), and the Mounted Infantry, was to follow Broadwood towards De Kiel's. The distance from that point to Waterval was in a straight line about three miles. Between the two, rather less than a mile below De Kiel's Drift proper, was a third ford, overlooked on the left bank by some low kopjes (D).[1]

In line of column of regimental masses, with the horse batteries in rear of their several brigades and the Mounted Infantry behind, the Division cleared the bivouac just as the moon disappeared. But the darkness and the roughness of the ground forbade further progress, and, as had been anticipated, French was compelled to halt for an hour and a half, until the rising sun allowed him to proceed.

[1] This ford was not marked on the map served out to the troops.


SKETCH OF THE
PASSAGE OF THE RIET RIVER
Feb. 12th 1900.
British
Boers
Langhoek
Riet River.
Blaauwbank.
Poortje.
2nd Boer Position.
8. a.m.
First Boer
Position 6-30. a.m.
Waterval
Drift.
Feint 8 a.m.
Eustace 7 a.m.
3rd Brigade
M.I
1st Brigade
Cavalry Division 6.30 a.m.
2nd Brigade
Ramdam
M.I. 8 a.m.
Kopjes seized
8. a.m.
Ford
9 a.m
Ford
De Kiel Drift. & Farm
French's Headquarters.
F
To Koffyfontein.
R.H.A.
8. a.m.
N
W
E
S
1
2
3 Miles. (approximate).

At about 6 a.m. the advanced guard discovered Boers[1] on the kopjes three miles north-west of Waterval Drift, and a gun opened fire from some hillocks nearer the river, the first shell passing close over the heads of the Staff. Two squadrons[2] of the 1st Brigade and Colonel Eustace's Brigade Division moved up to reinforce. The artillery silenced their opponent in a few rounds, and the hostile detachment fell back across Waterval Drift. The advanced squadrons occupied the kopjes without encountering resistance; and Gordon, supported by P and T Batteries,[3] proceeded to execute his feint at Waterval. Deceived by this movement, the enemy ensconced themselves on the high kopjes on the right bank of the stream and prepared to oppose the passage.

Meanwhile, Broadwood had reconnoitred in the direction of De Kiel's Drift, and seized with his advanced troops the low hills that overlooked the central ford. From this point detachments were pushed up stream towards De Kiel's, and R and O batteries came into action against the kopje (F), near which was a farmhouse where the Boer commandants were breakfasting. The main body of the 2nd Brigade halted on some kopjes in rear of the guns; the 1st Brigade and Mounted Infantry behind the hills already occupied by the advanced patrols. With these last was French himself, ready to attempt the central crossing as soon as the enemy should be sufficiently engaged on his right and left.

Whether he judged by ear or eye, his final advance was admirably timed. On a wide front the rest of the horse-artillery,[4] with the remainder of the 1st Brigade and the Mounted Infantry, suddenly swept forward in imposing array from behind the sheltering hills and thundered across the wide sloping plain which intervened between them and

[1] Mr. Goldmann states that Rimington's Horse had reported that the country was clear to the river. According to Mr. Maydon, Captain Rankin of that corps and six men struck on the enemy and were nearly caught. Evidently their report had not reached the Staff before the Boer gun opened fire.

[2] One squadron Scot Greys under Major Middleton; one squadron Inniskillings under Major Allenby.

[3] These belonged to the brigade divisions attached to the 1st and 2nd Brigade. It is not quite clear why they and not R and O were left with Gordon.

[4] G, Q, and U Batteries.

the low, green line of foliage that marked the course of the stream. Then for the first time were the Boers to realise the power that discipline and swift obedience to command can give to mounted troops. Two squadrons of Roberts's Horse rode straight to the central ford, and under a dropping rifle-fire dashed through the stream, and lined the opposite bank. The 1st Brigade with Q, U, and G Batteries immediately followed. The enemy, surprised by the suddenness of the advance, did not attempt to offer a serious resistance. Captain Majendie, a most valuable officer, was the only man killed; two privates were wounded.

Their left thus suddenly turned, the enemy at Waterval at once abandoned their positions. In a long stream they galloped across the British front, and moving parallel to the river, disappeared in the direction of Koffyfontein. Had our horse artillery, of which Q Battery was already on the right bank, been allowed to press forward, they could scarcely have escaped severe punishment, but the officer commanding the 1st Brigade considered that his orders did not justify his sending an escort with the guns, and the opportunity was lost.

The passage was gained by 9 a.m., and by midday the whole of French's force had crossed, the 2nd Brigade at the ford, R and O Batteries at De Kiel's, Gordon at Waterval. During the afternoon two squadrons of the 10th Hussars went six miles to the north-east to collect information as to the water supply, and came in touch with about fifty of the enemy, capturing a German ambulance from Jacobsdal, which was allowed to go free. Part of the 12th Lancers reconnoitred eastward along the river-bank, but did not regain touch with De Wet, who had withdrawn to Koffyfontein.[1] Before the cavalry returned to the Riet the 7th Division had arrived. It had left Ramdam at 7 a.m., but the head of the leading brigade did not reach De Kiel until an hour after midday, and the rear of the Division did not close up till 5 p.m. The men suffered terribly from want of water, the two carts attached to each battalion proving quite insufficient. There was much straggling, and the ambulances were loaded with men overcome with heat

[1] The German Staff account is therefore incorrect in stating that "not a single patrol" was sent to reconnoitre on the right flank. Whether all was done that should have been done is another question.

exhaustion.[1] Outposts at length were set, and the weary troops sank down to sleep, until awakened by the cold of the early morning.[2]

General French had made a good beginning, but the opposition was likely to increase with every forward step, and success was absolutely uncertain until the passages of the Modder, the occupation of which was likely to encounter strong resistance, had been secured. Speed was therefore essential, and an early start had been intended, but the cavalry transport which had been ordered forward from Ramdam an hour after the Riet Drifts had been seized, had become involved with General Tucker's trains, and did not reach De Kiel until midnight. The steepness of the banks prevented its crossing in the dark, and the brigades on the opposite side of the river could not obtain any food or forage until 8 a.m. on the morning of the 13th. Consequently the march was not begun until the sun was fully up, and its difficulties were thereby greatly aggravated. It was 10 a.m. before the Division moved off,[3] Gordon's Brigade joining in from Waterval, whence it had driven a few of the enemy. Under the eye of Lord Roberts, who had come from Ramdam, the splendid mass of horsemen marched out, advancing at first in line of regimental masses, afterwards in line of squadron columns at deploying intervals, a formation deliberately adopted in order to give any enemy who might be in the neighbourhood an impression of overwhelming strength. On the right was Alexander, in the centre Broadwood, on the left Gordon. Behind each brigade marched its horse artillery, and behind the batteries the Mounted Infantry.

[1] The German Staff History states that 21 men died of sunstroke in the 15th Brigade alone, and that nearly half of the rank and file were left behind. It remarks with truth that the 7th Division, which had but recently landed, was far more susceptible to heat and thirst than the 6th, which had been in South Africa for some weeks. The overwhelming thirst which, according to Sir Charles Warren, generally attacked newly-arrived troops, passed away after a few days' marching. That officer attributed the thirst experienced by the 5th Division during the Spion Kop operations to the same want of acclimatisation.

[2] De Wet's account of the seizure of the Riet Drifts is, like most of his accounts, extremely vague and sketchy. It may be remarked here that his dates are almost always incorrect, and that his nomenclature is so loose as often to render his story unintelligible without comparison of other narratives.

[3] Before starting it had been joined by the New Zealanders and two squadrons of Kitchener's Horse, which had made a night march from Ramdam.

The initial direction of the march was north-easterly, towards Blaauwboschpan, a detachment of the enemy, who held some rising ground in front of Gordon, obliging the Division to incline towards the right. At the same time the 1st Brigade, with Rochfort's Brigade Division, was sent out to reconnoitre some kopjes in the direction of Smouskraal. These they found unoccupied, and rejoined the division some time after midday at the pan. The supply of water—already badly needed—was only sufficient to fill three water-carts; and the well was left under the guard of a squadron of Kitchener's Horse, for the use of the infantry who were expected to follow.[1]

After a halt of about an hour the march was resumed at a rapid pace in terrific heat and clouds of dust. The Division now covered a front of over five miles, and French's gallopers were at times unable to rouse their horses to a trot, so great was their exhaustion. To save the artillery-horses, Major Lawrence of the 17th Lancers, who acted as guide throughout the cavalry operations, made a slight detour; and by 2 p.m. the Division had reached Ramdam, seven or eight miles east of Jacobsdal and about ten miles from Klip Drift on the Modder. At this moment a patrol under Lieutenant Johnston of the Inniskillings, on the extreme right of the line, rode up to a farm in front of which some Boer women were standing. Within a hundred yards of the buildings they came under a sudden fire, and their leader was wounded. Other parties of Boers now made their appearance and seemed to threaten an attack. Gordon was ordered to bring up his left shoulder to meet it, and P and G Batteries moved across from their position behind the 2nd Brigade to support the right. But Q Battery had already swung a section round to shell the farm, and in co-operation with Broadwood's batteries soon drove the enemy off. Spreading out into groups of two or three[2] to escape the shrapnel they galloped away towards the Modder.

[1] See map of Lord Roberts's operations, p. 353. The squadron of Kitchener's Horse was captured by De Wet after the seizure of the convoy at Waterval. According to his own account no resistance was offered.

[2] We are inclined to think that these Boers formed the detachment which De Wet had placed under Commandant Lubbe with orders to observe French's march. He estimated them at about 100 men. The German account criticises the scouting as inadequate,

With characteristic quickness French made the most of the incident. As the enemy still seemed inclined to hang upon his flank, he suddenly changed direction to the north-east and moved straight upon Klip Kraal Drift,[1] to give the idea that he intended to cross the Modder there. The Boers hurried away to block that passage; and French pressed steadily towards it, bringing up his left, drawing Alexander into second line and forming his right with Broadwood. For an hour and a half he held on his new course until near the farm of Middelbosch; then with the same rapidity as at the Riet he suddenly wheeled to the north-west and pushed down towards Klip and Ronddavel Drifts with all the speed that could be got out of horses half dead with exhaustion and thirst.

It is no easy thing thus to alter the march-direction of a long line of troops, since what for the men on the inner flank means little more than a turn in the required direction imposes on the outer flank a long, fast movement, and on the advanced squadrons a gallop of perhaps miles in order to regain their proper position and distance. During the final rush to the Modder this difficulty was greatly aggravated. The positions of the drifts were uncertain; the direction of the advance had frequently to be changed; and at every change fresh squadrons had to be pushed out at great speed to cover the advance of the main body, which was itself moving fast. As a consequence the last few miles sorely tried the endurance of the horses, already stretched to breaking point. In Alexander's Brigade alone sixty had fallen dead before he dropped back into second line.

From the moment that Blaauwboschpan had been left behind the straggling had steadily increased, until towards the end of the march the plain was covered with scattered riders, or with brown heaps marking the spots where their gallant animals had sunk down. To make matters worse, a veldt fire had sprung up behind the advancing

and quotes the comments of an eyewitness who attributes this want of thoroughness to the "universal imperturbable optimism of the race," which preferred to suffer occasionally by such neglect than to undergo the constant fatigue and discomforts of systematic reconnaissance.

[1] Six miles east of Klip Drift.

Division, which destroyed the field telegraph and cost the lives of not a few horses. In the artillery the effects of the march were more severe than in the cavalry. The collapse of a horse in a regiment does not affect the rest; the loss of an animal attached to a gun or waggon-limber throws more work on the remaining five. Other causes told with especial severity on the batteries. The work of the preceding day had been done in very heavy soil, much of it at the trot, part of it at the gallop. More time is required to water teams than single horses, and very often the halts had been too short to allow of their drinking. Since leaving the Riet, like the rest of the Division, the gallant brutes had not had a drop; and now that they were called upon for a fresh and strenuous effort many fell dead in their traces. Hohenlohe's famous march to Königgrätz was child's play compared with the last five miles to the Modder.

Once General French's change of direction was declared there was no time to lose; for delay would have enabled the enemy to offer a most effective resistance on the kopjes that overlooked the northern bank, and perhaps have prevented the Division from reaching the stream; a contingency which of itself would have imperilled its existence as a mobile force, and in any case would have compelled it to fall back to Middelbosch to water. Broadwood was ordered to ride for Klip Drift, Gordon for Ronddavel. On the further side of the river gleamed Boer laagers, and as the cavalry drew nearer waggons could be seen moving off in great haste and confusion.[1] Beyond a few rounds from a gun and a little rifle-fire no resistance was offered. On the left the 9th Lancers reached Ronddavel just in time to prevent some of the enemy disputing the passage; at Klip Drift the 12th Lancers occupied a windpump near the bank and pushed across, closely followed by the 10th Hussars and the Household Cavalry. As the occupants of the three laagers fled away up the hills, they presented a first-rate target for artillery. But the guns were far behind. As soon as the cavalry had begun their advance French had sent back a galloper to call the batteries up; but so tardy seemed the response that a fresh order had been

[1] De Wet, *Three Years' War*, p. 46, says that these men were "water-draggers," occupying much the same position as our Army Service Corps.

despatched to the effect "that the guns were to come on at all costs." Eventually G and P opened fire near behind Broadwood with eleven out of twelve guns, and a little later Colonel Eustace got his Brigade Division (R and O) into action opposite Ronddavel.[1] But the favourable moment had passed, and in spite of the efforts of Gordon and Broadwood's Brigades, which pursued four miles beyond the river, the enemy escaped. In so doing, however, they left behind a quantity of tents, rifles, ammunition, stores of all kinds, cattle, and sheep. Doughtins and half-cooked food scattered over the veldt showed how completely they had been surprised.

The three brigades of cavalry, including Alexander's, which arrived at 6 p.m., bivouacked on the northern bank; the 1st and 2nd at Klip Drift, the 3rd at Ronddavel. Alderson's Mounted Infantry held the southern bank; and on both sides of the river the surrounding kopjes were occupied. No baggage had arrived, and a heavy thunderstorm rendered the bivouac yet more cold and comfortless. All through the night dismounted troopers, who had lost their horses, struggled in, bringing such articles of their kit and horse furniture as they were able to carry; and dying horses, driven on by raging thirst, tottered down to the river and fell dead in the act of drinking. When morning dawned the effects of the march were more plainly visible. It was estimated that in dead and unfit it had cost the Division close on 500 horses. In G Battery, for instance, 16 horses had died, and 34 more were temporarily condemned.[2] The 12th Lancers lost 26 horses, and 37 were unfit to march. These figures may be taken as not exceptionally high. As events turned out it was certainly fortunate that the Division was not called upon to make a fourth consecutive march, and that a day of comparative rest was available in which to refit and, so far as was possible, to repair the losses. A sick horse depôt was formed, and it was determined to leave behind the ammunition column and to use its horses to drag the guns. At 4 p.m. Colonel Porter arrived

[1] Q, T, U, who had made a longer march and were less used to the climate than the rest never got into action at all.

[2] According to the German History 59 horses had died of exhaustion in the batteries.

with the remainder of the 1st Brigade, the divisional baggage and a much-needed supply of forage.

It was impossible for the cavalry to move until a sufficient force of infantry had arrived to hold the drift so as to block Cronje's retreat by the river bank and keep the way open for the rest of the army. But the delay must at the time have been extremely tantalizing. The seizure of the Modder Drifts had shut off one line of retreat to the enemy, but that to Kimberley and Boshof was still open, and it was more than likely that the Boer General would slip away before the cavalry was in a position to intercept him. Some of his laagers were visible from the kopjes north of the river and his main position was only twelve miles distant from Klip Drift. Yet no movement to the rear took place, and as the day advanced it became increasingly obvious that he had by no means given up hope of holding his position. Early in the morning a detachment under Froneman approached the drifts, and with three guns opened at long range upon the cavalry camps and the kopjes held by the British outposts. An attack threatened from the north-east and had to be driven off by detachments of the Household Cavalry and 10th Hussars assisted by artillery fire from both banks. All day sniping continued, and the tired men and horses on the outpost line got no rest. But the night closed in without any movement of Cronje's main body being reported, and as infantry were known to be approaching, preparations were made for a start on the following morning.[1]

The Field Telegraph laid down by the cavalry had been destroyed by the veldt fire of the preceding day, but early on the 14th Lord Kitchener was informed of the capture of the Modder Drifts; and by a fine effort the 6th Division, accompanied by a force of mounted infantry, reached Klip Drift early on the 15th. The leading brigade came up at 2 a.m., the remainder, which did not start until after midnight, about seven hours later. At dawn General Kelly-Kenny,

[1] Again the German History blames the cavalry for inadequate scouting, and considers that had this been better performed French might have learnt by the night of the 14th that the investment on the south side of Kimberley had been abandoned. In view of the proximity of the enemy and the exhaustion of the horses, this criticism seems scarcely reasonable. As a matter of fact the route as far as Abonsdam was reconnoitred several times during the day.

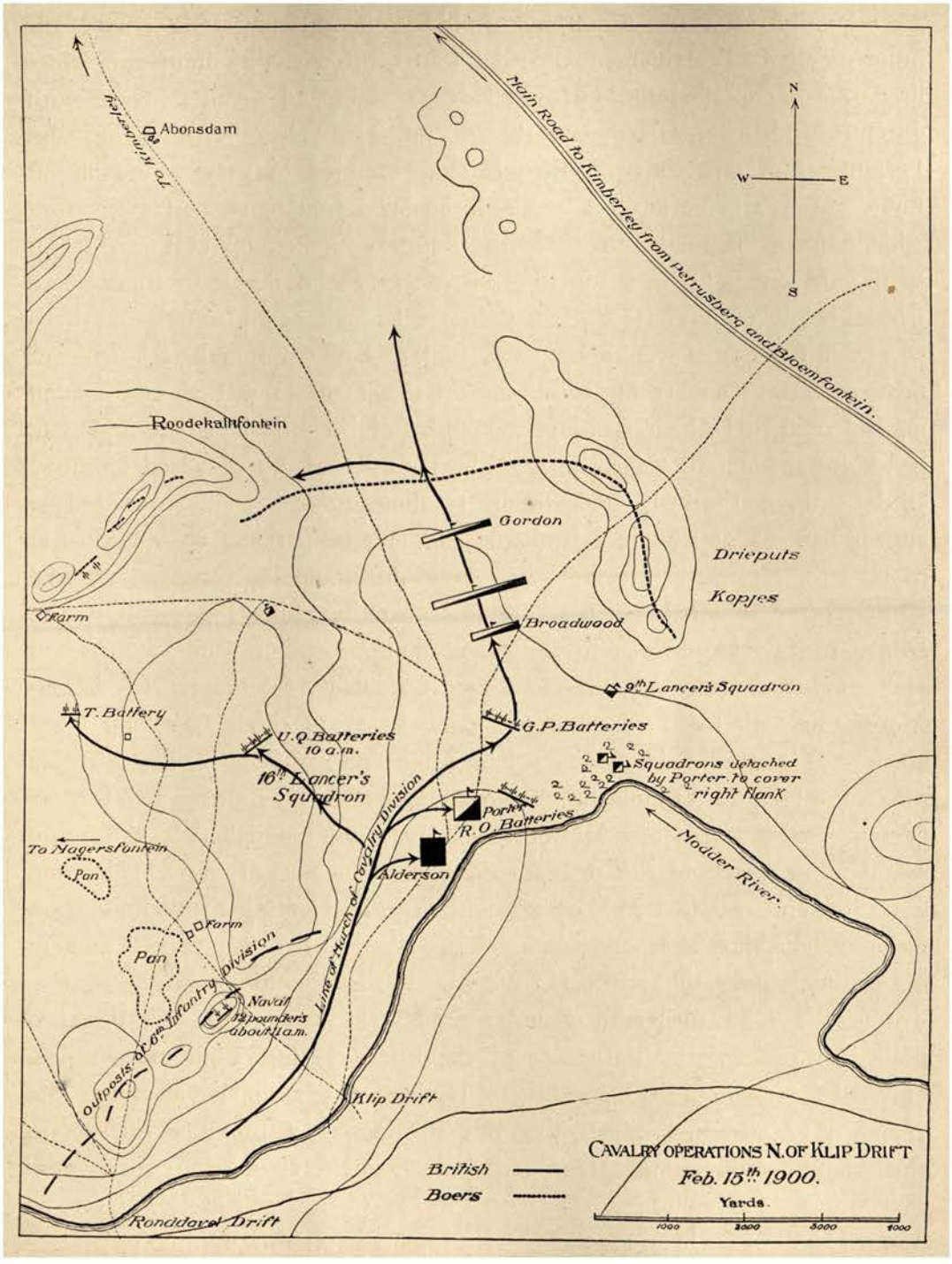
accompanied by Lord Kitchener and General French, rode round the outposts and ordered his batteries across the river to take the place of those of the Cavalry Division. Two Naval 12-pounders were with great difficulty placed in position on the main kopje in front of Klip Drift, the ground being so rugged that the guns had to be taken off their carriages. Three days' [1] supplies were issued to the cavalry; more could not be issued as there were no spare horses to carry it.[2] The regiments from India carried less than the others, as they were without corn-bags.

By 8 a.m. the infantry had taken over the outposts, and at 9.30 a.m. the Cavalry Division stood formed up in column of brigade masses with the horse artillery on their left or uncovered flank. The 3rd Brigade led, followed by the 2nd, 1st, and Alderson's Mounted Infantry. Little was known of the enemy's dispositions, but a considerable laager was visible on the left flank, and a heavy attack was anticipated from that direction. That the Division would be able to relieve Kimberley was anything but certain. The combined strength of the enemy round the town and at Magersfontein was reckoned at 10,000 men; and there was no reason why the cavalry should not find themselves opposed by a force numerically equal to their own, for forty hours had passed since French had seized the Modder Drifts — ample time in which to organise a vigorous resistance. Similarly the further question of whether any appreciable loss could be inflicted on Cronje would in a great degree depend upon the day's operations. No one was likely to realise the difficulties and uncertainties of the situation more clearly than French, when with a weary and weakened Division he entered upon the last stage of his memorable enterprise.

Above Klip Drift the Modder runs in a broad loop, the distance from the crossing to the point of the curve being about three miles. On the northern bank, parallel to but about a mile distant from the course of the stream, ran a low ridge, rising to its greatest height in the kopje in front of Klip Drift on which the Naval guns were

[1] *I.e.*, rations for the 14th, 15th, and 16th.

[2] Some spare horses were taken, but few reached Kimberley, and most of the corn had to be left on the veldt.—*Goldmann*, p. 81.


To Kimberley
Abonsdam
Main Road to Kimberley from Petrusberg and Bloemfontein.
N
W
E
S
Roodekalfontein
Gordon
Broadwood
Drieputs
Kopjes
Farm
9th Lancers Squadron
T. Battery
G.P. Batteries
U.Q. Batteries
10 a.m.
16th Lancer's Squadron
Squadrons detached by Porter to cover right flank
Porter's R.O. Batteries
Alderson
To Hagersfontein
Pan
Farm
Pan
Line of March of Cavalry Division
Modder River
Naval 12 pounders about 11 a.m.
Outposts of 6th Infantry Division
Klip Drift
Ronddavel Drift
British
Boers
CAVALRY OPERATIONS N. OF KLIP DRIFT
Feb. 15th 1900.
Yards.
1000
2000
3000
4000

placed, and in a rough series of hills which terminated some three miles north of the river, in the direction of Roodekalkfontein. Another line of kopjes, called the Drieput ridge, east of and parallel to this last, extended northwards from the river-loop. The valley between the two, varying from one to two miles broad, ascended in very gentle slopes for about five miles until it reached the level scrub-covered plain, across which the main road ran through Roodekalkfontein and Weil's Farm to Kimberley. Guided by the direction of the flight of the Boers from Middlebosch on the 13th, General French had guessed that both the flanking ridges would be held, and this assumption had been confirmed by frequent reconnaissances on the 14th. But the valley itself he expected to be less strongly occupied, and by it he had determined to penetrate the enemy's positions. The pass forced, he proposed to move straight upon the besieged town, trusting to the suddenness of his appearance to scatter the besieging force and perhaps enable him to capture their siege artillery.

Starting under shelter of the kopjes held by the infantry, the Division moved north-east along the bank, Gordon sending out one squadron of the 9th Lancers to clear the bush near the river-bed, and one of the 16th to reconnoitre the ground on the left. The main body of the leading brigade had scarcely reached the opening of the valley when its advanced squadrons came under rifle-fire; and as the mass of the Division followed Gordon, two Boer guns under Albrecht, on a ridge 3,000 yards to the north-west, opened fire upon the squadron of the 16th, and dropped shells all round the mass of guns and horsemen. Colonel Rochfort's batteries, upon the flank of the 1st Brigade,[1] at once wheeled to the left and moved up the gentle slope to reply to this fire, but advancing into action with all their horses and waggon-limbers showing, they presented a fine target and suffered considerably. It was one of the comparatively rare occasions on which the Boers used shrapnel effectively, and within a few minutes Lieutenant Barnes and twelve men lay killed and wounded round the guns. But the initial disadvantage was soon made good by superior numbers and discipline. U and Q batteries opened a frontal fire upon the

[1] Colonel Porter had assumed command of the 1st Brigade on reaching Klip Drift.

Boer guns, T moved round into the plain to the left to take them in flank, and before long they ceased firing. U and Q then changed front half-right and threw a few shells on some hills to the right, from which fire seemed to be coming.[1] No reply was made, and within half an hour the artillery duel was over.

In the meantime French had developed his attack. While changing ground to the right to escape the Boer shells, the Division had been brought to a halt by an outbreak of rifle-fire from the Drieput kopjes. Eustace's batteries opened fire across the front of Porter and Gordon, but they failed to silence the Mausers that rattled along the rocky hills. Fire also was audible from the western ridges and from the centre of the valley, and before many minutes had passed it was evident that the Cavalry Division was shut in by the enemy. An ordinary soldier might have attempted to clear the hills by dismounted action. But such a course would have been costly in men and time. The hour had arrived when French was to prove himself, to quote Lord Roberts's own description, "a man of exceptional nerve." His plan was already decided on, his mind was made up. "We shall have to gallop for it," he said, and calling Colonel Gordon to him bade him take the remaining squadrons of his brigade and charge up the valley to the point where the encircling ridges sank into the plain. It was a stroke of great daring, for French could not know how strongly the gap was held or what was beyond it,[2] and the only factor he could reckon on was his enemy's dread of being isolated or outflanked. The bold throw succeeded brilliantly. Wheeling into line and in widely extended order, the 16th Lancers on the left and the 9th on the right swept up the valley at a steady gallop under a continuous fire from the Drieput ridge and from the front, and disappeared from the eyes of the spectators in a whirling cloud of dust. The enemy perceived the object of the

[1] It was discovered afterwards that the enemy were ranging on a blanket which was spread over some bushes near the crest of the ridge. This brief duel affords some idea of the rapidity with which concealed batteries at a known range can inflict loss on artillery which has not these advantages.

[2] For instance, the Lancers might easily have come upon a wire fence within effective range of the enemy's position. It would seem that Lieutenant Hesketh, of the 16th, met his death while cutting wire under a heavy fire.

charge, and, descending from the hills, galloped to block the mouth of the valley. But it was too late. Through an increasing fire the wave of attack rolled on unbroken and burst through the ring of riflemen who had vainly endeavoured to check it. Most of them fled before the lances reached them; a few were speared or taken prisoners, others escaped through the intervals of the charging horsemen. Swinging outwards, the left-hand squadron rode to try and cut off the Boer guns, but they had already disappeared. The remainder of the brigade galloped on to occupy a ridge of kopjes five miles from the point where their long gallop had begun. Half a mile behind Gordon rode the 2nd Brigade, the 10th Hussars and 12th Lancers in front, the Household Cavalry in second line, while Colonel Davidson's Brigade Division behind covered the advance by firing on the Drieput ridge. In spite of this Broadwood's regiments came under a stinging fire from their right, and a good many horses were wounded as they rode on. But the spectacle of this irresistible flood of cavalry thundering through their midst was too much for the enemy. In great confusion they fled east and west, abandoning all their positions before Porter's Brigade, which had been left to escort the artillery and cover the right flank by the river-bed, received orders to join the rest of the Division. The last of the enemy to stand seems to have been Albrecht, who once more brought his guns into effective action as Rochfort's batteries left the ridge to follow the mounted troops.[1] But he, too, had retired before Gordon's Lancers could reach him, and under the long-range fire of the Naval guns above Klip Drift the whole of the western Boer wing hastily retreated towards Magersfontein. So complete was the enemy's collapse that Porter's Brigade, with the five batteries of horse artillery and the Mounted Infantry, moved up the valley without having a shot fired at them. The charge had only cost the 3rd Brigade 16 men and about 30 horses killed and wounded.[2]

[1] The losses of Q, U, and T amounted to one officer and eight men killed, one officer and ten men wounded. A good many horses were also killed, one of the guns of Q Battery losing its entire team.

[2] The daring originality of this operation is appreciated at its true worth by the

Some time elapsed before the scattered brigades could be collected and reformed, and Abonsdam was not reached until 11.50 a.m. Here for nearly an hour the Division rested; but although sufficient water was found for the men, none was available for the horses. Leaving 200 Mounted Infantry and two guns of Q Battery to guard the spring for the infantry,[1] French again advanced rapidly until about 2 p.m., from the top of a long rise six miles north of Abonsdam, the tall chimneys of Kimberley rose out of the veldt, and were hailed with loud cheering. The enemy were still shelling the town, but parties were out to watch for the relief column, and one of these galloped hastily back as the advanced cavalry came in sight. Ascending a neighbouring kopje, General French tried for some time to establish signalling communication with the garrison. "Owing to some conflicting technicality, for which the officer in command was not responsible,"[2] the town-signallers insisted on taking him for the enemy, and about 3 p.m. it was decided to push on without waiting any longer. Leaving 200 more Mounted Infantry to guard a water-windmill and well, the Division spread out; Broadwood, on the left, being sent in the direction of Alexandersfontein, while Gordon was ordered to press forward along the Benaauwheidsfontein road until he got into touch with the enemy. Porter, on the right, moved more to the east. Slowly, with constant changes of direction which imposed heavy work on the advanced squadrons, the brigades moved on. As they drew nearer the town considerable bodies of the enemy galloped hastily to the right across their front, but out of reach of the weary squadrons. Only on the extreme right was there anything which resembled fighting. At about 5 p.m. French wheeled the 1st and 3rd Brigades to the northward, and moved towards a laager east of Fort Susannah. Rochfort's batteries shelled a kopje near it, but no reply was made, and when a squadron

historians of the German Staff. They quote an English eyewitness who writes that had anything of the kind been attempted at Aldershot, the whole of the cavalry would have been put out of action; and the attack condemned as an act of imbecility.

[1] This is one of several indications that a general concentration upon Kimberley was regarded as a possibility. See below for Colvile's first orders on the 16th.

[2] Goldsmann, p. 85. This conflicts with other accounts, which state that communication was finally established.

of the Scots Greys galloped into the camp they found it evacuated. By 6 p.m. all the Boer positions on the south and east of Kimberley had been abandoned.

Before this hour Colonel Kekewich had come to the conclusion that the distant troops were British, and had decided to act vigorously on the north of the town, in the hope of capturing the big gun. At half-past five all the troops on the southern defences, and all the disposable reserves, some 650 in number, with four guns and three Maxims, moved out under Colonel Murray. As night was coming on the mounted scouts reached Diebel's Vlei, and reported the Boer works in that neighbourhood still held by the enemy. Nevertheless Colonel Murray decided to advance, and in the gathering darkness occupied two of the enemy's redoubts. A detachment of the Diamond Fields Horse then threatened the Intermediate Pumping Station, where it came under a sharp fire. Murray was about to attack, when Colonel Kekewich, in view of the large numbers of the enemy still hovering near, directed him to halt; and he bivouacked in the positions he had seized, pushing a reconnaissance towards Dronfield in the course of the night.

The lateness of the hour and the exhaustion of the horses had already put an end to the cavalry operations. Broadwood bivouacked at Alexandersfontein, the rest of the Division at De Beers; and at seven o'clock in the evening French himself rode into Kimberley.

Although the first part of his task had been brilliantly accomplished the besiegers had escaped unpunished; and in the absence of news of Cronje, who actually began his retreat about the hour that the cavalry had reached Kimberley, he rode northwards at dawn on the 16th with the 1st and 3rd Brigades of Cavalry and the Mounted Infantry, leaving Broadwood at Alexandersfontein to cover the town and reconnoitre to the southward. Colonel Kekewich accompanied French, bringing with him several policemen to act as guides.

Soon after daybreak reports were sent in by Colonel Murray that the Intermediate Pumping Station had been evacuated, but that the enemy were still holding the western extremity of the Dronfield ridge, and that their cattle were grazing to north of it. A considerable

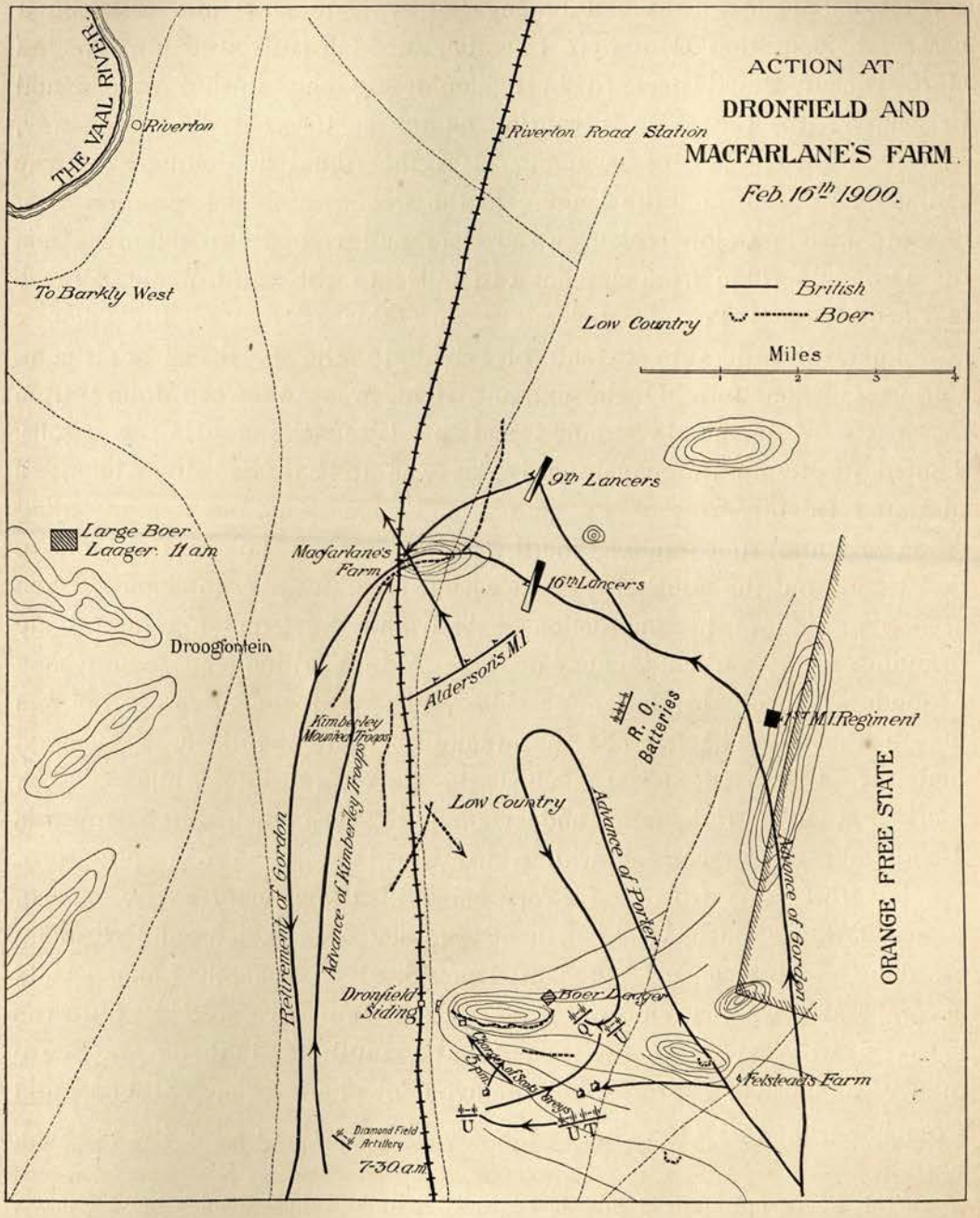
mass of waggons[1] were also visible from the town moving northwards past Kamfersdam and the Pumping Station, and by half-past seven it became evident that they were retreating upon Riverton. Other bodies of the enemy could be seen in motion along the Boshof roads; and French, by this time also advancing on the eastern side of the railway, conceived the project of swinging his right round and enveloping the Dronfield position and the laagers to the west.

Meanwhile Colonel Murray's artillery had come into action against the Dronfield ridge from a point two miles to the south-west. French at once directed Porter's Brigade against this portion of the enemy's position with orders to extend his right to the north of Felstead's Farm. Gordon, forming the extreme right, was to sweep round from the eastward upon Macfarlane's and head off the retiring waggons. The gap between the cavalry brigades was to be filled by Alderson's Mounted Infantry.

Gordon at once moved northwards, and then failing to intercept the Boers on the Boshof roads, wheeled westwards to execute the second portion of his instructions. At 9 a.m. he found a strong body of the enemy, estimated at 2,000 men,[2] in position on some rising ground east of Macfarlane's siding, and at once proceeded to attack them. The 16th Lancers and Eustace's artillery came into action from the south-east against the enemy's front; while the 9th worked to the right and endeavoured to turn their left. But the Boers met the movement with a heavy rifle-fire, and constantly prolonging their line frustrated every effort of the cavalry to overlap it. Sharp fighting ensued; Lieutenant Brassey was killed, and Captain Gordon-Campbell and Lieutenant Durand, all of the 9th Lancers, and several men, were wounded. Guns were urgently needed, but the batteries were at some distance to the south, and the teams were utterly exhausted. The whole movement had been checked, and French, seeing that Gordon was not strong enough to clear the position,

[1] This laager, unknown to French, seems to have contained Cronje's heavy artillery, which had been sent round the west of the town on the preceding evening.

[2] The German account states that the Boers were only 100 strong. This can only refer to the small detachment at Dronfield. No doubt, however, 2,000 is an overestimate.


ACTION AT
DRONFIELD AND
MACFARLANE'S FARM.
Feb. 16th 1900.
British
Boer
Miles
1
2
3
4
THE VAAL RIVER
Riverton
Riverton Road Station
To Barkly West
Low Country
9th Lancers
16th Lancers
Large Boer Laager. 11 a.m.
Macfarlane's Farm
Droogfontein
Alderson's M.I.
R. O. Batteries
1st M.I. Regiment
Kimberley Mounted Troops
Advance of Kimberley Troops
Low Country
Advance of Porter
Advance of Gordon
ORANGE FREE STATE
Retirement of Gordon
Dronfield Siding
Boer Laager
Felstead's Farm
Diamond Field Artillery
7-30 a.m.

turned to look for reinforcements. But Porter, on whom he had counted for support, was closely engaged at Dronfield; and although a part[1] of Alderson's Mounted Infantry were already well forward on Gordon's left, the General delayed employing them until Porter should be ready to co-operate. At length, as the 1st Brigade did not appear, French ordered Alderson to attack. Directing the 3rd Mounted Infantry against Macfarlane's Farmhouse, that officer turned the position west of the railway with his Colonials and rapidly cleared it. In this operation he was supported by some Kimberley troops whom Colonel Murray had sent forward from Dronfield.

There was still time[2] to intercept the Boer convoy, which at 11 a.m. had been halted near Droogfontein, five miles to west of Macfarlane's. But just at the moment when a vigorous forward movement of the cavalry seemed to promise complete success, the condition of its horses deprived that arm of the fruit of its efforts. The heat, as on the preceding days, was unusual even for South Africa. Gordon had been unable to find water, and his animals were in a state of pitiable exhaustion. Even at Macfarlane's no water was to be had, and the ground favoured the delaying tactics, which the enemy were certain to employ before they abandoned their waggons. Most unwillingly—for a rich prize was almost within his grasp—French ordered a retirement on Kimberley, and the wearied squadrons fell slowly back towards Dronfield. The main body of the enemy, under Du Toit, at first retired towards Barkly West; ultimately they regained Riverton.

Meanwhile on the left Porter had become involved in one of those harassing actions of which the campaign produced so many examples. Turning to the west at about 8 a.m., his main body neared the south-eastern end of the Dronfield ridge just as Murray's guns opened fire upon its western extremity. Owing to the sharp change of direction the advanced scouts had not wheeled sufficiently

[1] The 1st Mounted Infantry Regiment had been left to guard the rear on some hills on the border of the Free State. Those available for an attack on Macfarlane's consisted of the 3rd Mounted Infantry Regiment, the New Zealanders, Queenslanders, and Roberts's Horse.

[2] According to Mr. Goldmann it was midday; other accounts state that the Mounted Infantry did not reach Macfarlane's till 2 p.m.

to cover the Brigade, and some Boers concealed in shallow trenches amongst the scrub opened fire at a range of 600 yards while the cavalry were still in mass formation. Had not the Brigade been partially sheltered by the ground it would have lost heavily. Two squadrons of the Scots Greys[1] and Major Allenby's Inniskillings dismounted; and in the belief that the ridge was held by a few scouts commenced to attack it. But although they succeeded in advancing by rushes to within 150 yards of the enemy they could get no further, and unsupported by the artillery were obliged to retire. U and T Batteries now came into action, but the Boers held on obstinately, and after some time Colonel Porter moved northward to assist Gordon, leaving U and the three dismounted squadrons to hold the enemy fast. After going three miles towards Macfarlane's the 1st Brigade met the troops under French returning and with them resumed the attack on the laager at Dronfield.

A determined effort was now made to capture or destroy the stubborn enemy. The 1st Brigade crossed the ridge to the south; the 3rd kept at first to the north, eventually moving round to the south-west. The laager lying within a fold of the slope was heavily shelled by T and O Batteries firing from the northward, while U swept the scrub on the south-western face and the dismounted squadrons redoubled their fire. A squadron of the Scots Greys then mounted and charged the western end of the ridge; but the ground was unsuited to such tactics, and the enemy, opening a smart fire, emptied several saddles and drove it off. Gradually, however, the 1st Brigade gained ground, and succeeded in reaching the crest of the ridge at about 600 yards distant from the laager. The fire of the distant batteries still proving indecisive, Major Phipps-Hornby was ordered to go in to as close a range as possible and endeavour to enfilade it. He succeeded in finding a hidden position within 600 yards of the enemy, and for an hour and a half, in spite of the fierce fire that was directed against them, two guns of Q Battery, under cover of the sheltering crest, poured shrapnel at point-blank range into the Boer camp.

But although their tents began to burn, the enemy refused

[1] Exclusive of horse-holders they numbered about 60 carbines.

to yield. At one moment an assault was contemplated, but General French decided that the gain would not be worth the inevitable loss, and directed the troops to return to Kimberley. The 3rd Mounted Infantry, New Zealanders and Queenslanders, with two guns, were left under Colonel Pilcher's orders to hold Macfarlane's Farm. Next day the Dronfield laager was found evacuated. In it the enemy had left a gun and a few dead, most of them rebels.

The results of the 16th were very disappointing, and in no way compensated for its ruinous consequences to the horses.[1] The movement had indeed driven the besiegers from Kimberley, and made it impossible for them to co-operate, for some days at least, with Cronje. But following on the great exertions of the preceding days its effects had been to demobilise the 1st and 3rd Brigades and most of the Mounted Infantry, and to leave disposable for immediate action only Broadwood's Brigade, which had borne its full share of the fatigues of the march to Kimberley, and was a perilously small force with which to attempt any extended operation. In thus pursuing the scattered bands of the besiegers French momentarily lost sight of his true objective, Cronje's army. It is possible that Lord Roberts's instructions to attempt the capture of the Boer siege artillery may have influenced his judgment; and that this eccentric movement was an indirect consequence of the plan of campaign, which made Kimberley and not Magersfontein the primary centre of operations.

Nor even for Broadwood's regiments had the day been one of complete rest. B Squadron of the 10th Hussars had been sent eight miles to the south to establish communication with the mounted infantry, and C Squadron had reconnoitred in the direction of Spytfontein. The latter had seen scattered parties of the enemy; but the first news of the Boer retreat seems to have come from the detached post at Abonsdam, which had viewed the tail of Cronje's waggon-train moving eastward, three miles away, at dawn. A report of this apparition was despatched to French, but he does not appear to have received it till the evening.[2] At any rate, although the sound of heavy

[1] One of the detached squadrons was without water for twenty-seven hours.

[2] The German Staff History says: "On his return to Kimberley General French

firing to the southward was clearly audible during the day, no definite news reached the commander of the cavalry before 10.30 p.m.; and when he bade his staff good-night he told them that they could sleep late into the next morning. But he had scarcely retired to rest when Lieutenant Chester Master, of Rimington's Horse, rode in with a message from Lord Kitchener informing him of Cronje's retreat along the north bank and the action of Klip Kraal, and adding that if "French, with all available horses and guns, could head him and prevent his crossing the river the infantry from Klip Drift would press on and annihilate or take the whole force prisoners."[1] The message estimated the strength of the enemy at 10,000 men and four guns.[1]

To intercept so large a body with a force barely one-eighth of its number was a perilous task, but French did not hesitate. Porter was ordered to remain at Kimberley with the 1st and 3rd Brigades of Cavalry and the Mounted Infantry in order to protect the town until Lord Methuen's arrival, and above all to give the horses time to recover from their fatigue. Instructions issued for a reconnaissance were at once countermanded, and orders were sent to Broadwood to march at 3 a.m. by the shortest route to Koedoesrand Drift. French himself, with two squadrons of Carabineers,[2] would follow at an hour's interval.

At the appointed time the decisive movement of the campaign was begun, and dawn saw the men of the 2nd Brigade hurrying

received a report from General Broadwood that a large column of Boers with guns and numerous waggons had retired eastward from the heights of Magersfontein, and that the country south of Kimberley was entirely free of the enemy" (p. 29).

[1] Captain Cecil Boyle, *Nineteenth Century*. No doubt the total of the Boer force was much nearer 5,000 than 10,000, but when French started to intercept Cronje he cannot have known this. According to the German Staff History, the order to French was sent in duplicate; one message by telegraph from Modder River, the other by Chester Master from Klip Drift. The first did not reach its destination until several days later, so that had not the precaution of sending the second been taken, Cronje would have escaped.

[2] The other squadron of Carabineers was sent on a reconnaissance towards the north-east to observe the retiring forces of the besiegers.

towards the Modder as fast as their weakened horses could carry them.[1]

[1] The casualties in French's column between the 12th and 16th of February inclusive were approximately as follows:—

	Officers.			N.C.O.'s and Men.		
Cavalry.	K.	W.	M.	K.	W.	M.
1st Brigade—						
2nd Dragoons	1	2	—	3	6	—
6th Dragoons	—	1	—	—	2	—
14th Hussars	—	—	—	—	1	—
2nd Brigade—						
10th Hussars	—	—	—	—	1	—
12th Lancers	—	—	—	—	1	—
3rd Brigade—						
9th Lancers	1	2	—	1	17	—
16th Lancers	1	1	—	1	18	2
Mounted Infantry—						
Roberts's Horse ...	1	—	—	—	5	—
Royal Horse Artillery ...	1	3	—	1	22	—
Totals	5	9	—	6	74	2

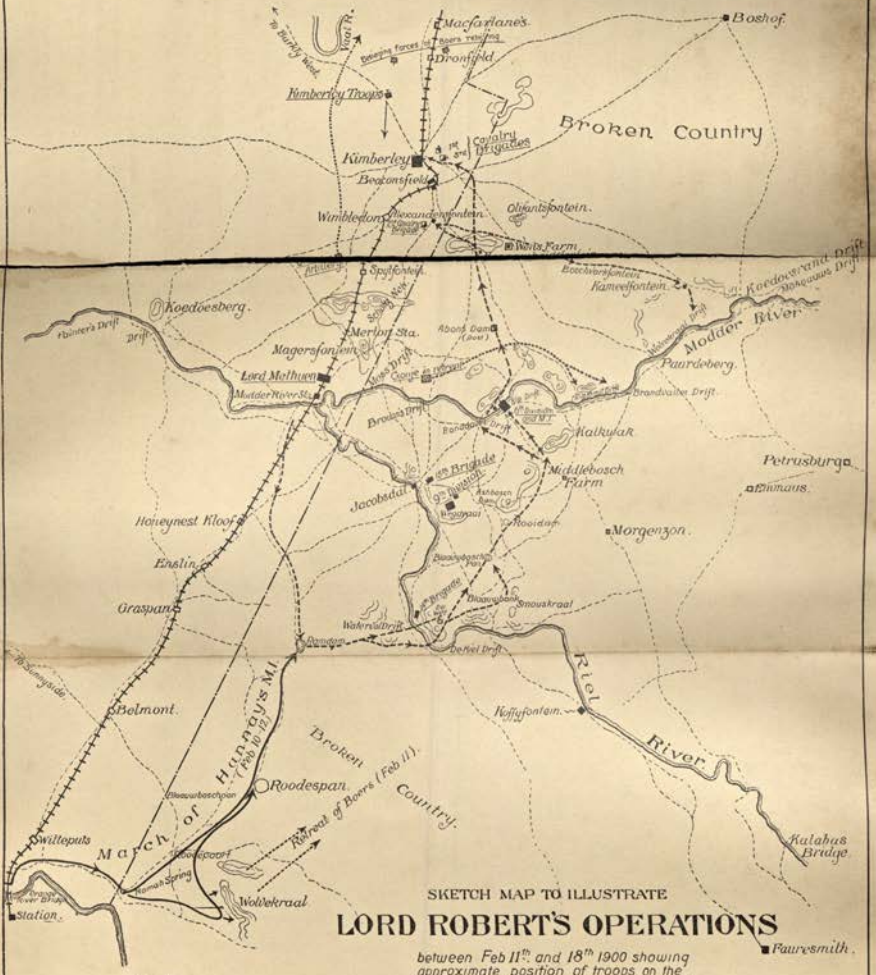
CHAPTER XIII

THE PURSUIT OF CRONJE

ADVANCE OF THE INFANTRY—FEBRUARY 13TH, THE 7TH DIVISION AT DE KIEL'S DRIFT—DIFFICULTIES OF THE PASSAGE—THE 6TH DIVISION AT WATERVAL—THE 9TH DIVISION AT RAMDAM—FEBRUARY 14TH, MOVEMENT OF THE 6TH DIVISION TO WEGDRAAI—NIGHT MARCH TO KLIP DRIFT—INACTION OF THE 6TH DIVISION ON THE 15TH—MOVEMENTS OF THE MOUNTED INFANTRY, FEBRUARY 12TH–14TH—THE CONVOY AT WATERVAL—CRITICISM OF DE WET'S INACTION BETWEEN 12TH AND 15TH—ATTACK ON THE CONVOY—THE OXEN INSPANNED—REINFORCEMENTS SENT BACK FROM WEGDRAAI—MOVEMENT OF THE 7TH MOUNTED INFANTRY—POSITION AT NIGHTFALL—ABANDONMENT OF THE CONVOY—REASONS FOR THIS—RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOSSES AT WATERVAL—BOLDNESS OF LORD ROBERTS'S DECISION—CRONJE ABANDONS MAGERSFONTEIN—HIS WARNINGS—TARDINESS OF HIS DECISION—HIS ENERGETIC ACTION ON THE NIGHT OF THE 15TH—ORDERS OF GENERAL KELLY-KENNY FOR 16TH—BEGINNING OF HIS MARCH—CRONJE'S WAGGON TRAIN DISCOVERED—ACTION OF MOUNTED INFANTRY AND 13TH BRIGADE—THE DRIEPUTS RIDGE CLEARED—RETIREMENT OF ROOS TOWARDS KLIP KRAAL—LORD KITCHENER WITHDRAWS THE MOUNTED INFANTRY FROM THE NORTH BANK—CRITICISM OF HIS PLAN OF ATTACK—INFANTRY AGAIN ENGAGED—TURNING MOVEMENT OF MOUNTED INFANTRY CHECKED—THE BOER COUNTER ATTACK—THE WEST RIDING REGIMENT CLEARS THE RIGHT OF THE POSITION—END OF THE ACTION—DISPERSION OF TROOPS AT KLIP KRAAL UNFAVOURABLE TO SUCCESS—ACTION OF THE MOUNTED INFANTRY—THE NEW SITUATION—ORDERS OF LORD ROBERTS ON 16TH—HIS DECISION—ADVANCE OF THE 9TH DIVISION FROM JACOBSDAL—PURSUIT OF THE 17TH—ADVANCE OF THE CAVALRY—CRONJE'S RETREAT STOPPED AT WOLVEKRAAL—THE DAY AND EVENING OF THE 17TH—APPROACH OF THE INFANTRY.

FAR behind French's squadrons the infantry with the field artillery and baggage toiled slowly onward.[1] The distances which they had to cover, as compared with those traversed in other campaigns, were not unusually great, but the cumbrousness of the transport trains, the badness of the roads, and the intensity of the heat, seriously retarded the march and imposed great hardships on the troops. As we have already recounted, the 7th Division had arrived at De Kiel's Drift on the Riet during the afternoon of the 12th, and had taken over the defence of

[1] No tents were carried; all were left standing in the camps along the railway. This was done partly in order to deceive the enemy as to the movement of the troops, partly with a view to lightening the transport.



SKETCH MAP TO ILLUSTRATE

LORD ROBERT'S OPERATIONS

between Feb 11th and 18th 1900 showing approximate position of troops on the night of Feb. 15th (at the moment when Cronje abandoned Magersfontein) and the march of the Cavalry to Kimberley and Paardeberg.

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the passage from French, when on the morning of the 13th he pushed on to the Modder. A further advance on the same day in the track of the cavalry seems originally to have been contemplated,[1] but the difficulties that attended the passage of the waggons rendered any such movement impracticable. Strenuous exertions alone had made it possible to bring over the vehicles indispensable to the cavalry. Owing to the failure of their mules, much of their baggage had been dragged across by the teams belonging to Tucker's field artillery; and the greater part of their supply-waggons had not reached the right bank before they started. When these had crossed, there still remained the trains of the 7th Division, and for two days and a night the troops had to stand fast while their crowded mass of transport unrolled its slow length down to the drift, and struggled through the muddy water. A large part of the 13th was employed in blasting an improved passage to the edge of the stream, for the original road had an incline of 1 in 5, a slope far too steep for waggons and ammunition carts. This preliminary accomplished the weary passage recommenced; and the mules still refusing to pull, the artillery horses were again requisitioned. When they became exhausted the work was continued by batches of fifty men from the different infantry battalions, reliefs taking their places at regular intervals. But although the troops laboured incessantly throughout the night of the 13th–14th, midday had arrived before all the baggage had been brought over; and it was not until the evening that the 7th Division left De Kiel's Drift to march to Wegdraai. So great had the difficulties been that Lord Roberts, who had been present on the 13th, saw fit to issue a special order regulating the distribution of command at the passage of drifts,[2] and diverted the 6th Division, which was to have crossed at De Kiel, to Waterval.

A day later than the brigades of the 7th Division, Kelly-Kenny's

[1] French had left a guard at the wells at Blaauwboschpan with this special object. It is questionable whether the 7th Division could have marched again on the 13th, even if it had not been delayed by the transport; so complete was its exhaustion after the exertions of the 12th. Ultimately none of the infantry marched by Blaauwboschpan; probably because the water supply at the wells was insufficient.

[2] Field order, February 13th. General Kelly-Kenny passed some of the cavalry trains over the river at Waterval.

troops had concentrated at Graspan and Enslin, and on the 12th reached Ramdam, where they were joined by the divisional artillery[1] and the Staff of the army. On the 13th the whole of the 6th Division, together with the main body of Hannay's Mounted Infantry, marched to Waterval, and spent the remainder of the day and most of the night getting the transport over the drift. Some of the troops which had been sent across had great difficulty in procuring food.

Adopting the somewhat cumbrous order of march in column of divisions, an arrangement probably dictated by considerations of distance and of food and water supply,[2] Lord Roberts had directed the 9th Division to concentrate on the railway one day's march behind Kelly-Kenny. Its commander had had only three days in which to organise it for the field, and it was midnight on the 12th before the last of the trains conveying the newly-formed 19th Brigade steamed into Graspan. Twelve hours later (12 noon on February 13th) the head of Smith-Dorrien's column arrived at Ramdam after a march which severely tried its men and the mules of the divisional transport.[3] Of the latter 370, still in soft condition after their oversea journey, were cast as unfit; of the former many had to be kept back to assist with the broken-down waggons. So frequent were the delays that the last part of the column did not reach their halting-point until after sunset. Long before that hour the Highland Brigade had marched in from Enslin with the 82nd Field Battery, the 65th Howitzer Battery, two 4·7-inch guns under Commander W. L. Grant and the Mounted Infantry of the City Imperial Volunteers.

With his cavalry thrown forward on the Modder, two-thirds of his infantry on the Riet, and the remaining division about twelve miles behind Lord Roberts's preliminary march was practically accomplished, and its object being declared, it was desirable to press on as rapidly as possible. But on the morning of the 14th, without

[1] This included two naval 12-pounders commanded by Lieutenant Dean. The 82nd Battery was temporarily allotted to the 9th Division. [2] See footnote on p. 332.

[3] In the early part of Lord Roberts's campaign the allowance of two water-carts (double that laid down in the regulations) to each battalion and one to each cavalry regiment and battery was found quite insufficient. In his despatch of February 16th Lord Roberts makes special reference to this and asks for a further supply.

news from French,[1] and with the 7th Division still delayed by the block at the De Kiel's Drift, a combined advance to the Modder drifts was impossible; and Lord Roberts had to content himself with preparatory movements until the general direction of his future operations could be definitely determined. With this object the 6th Division, accompanied by part of Colonel Hannay's Mounted Infantry, marched from Waterval to Wegdraai, a spot fifteen miles below Waterval on the right bank of the Riet,[2] while the 9th Division, with a supply park of 184 waggons and over 3,000 oxen, occupied Waterval. Once more the process of crossing imposed serious delay. The big naval guns gave great trouble in spite of the efforts of 36 oxen and 400 men at the drag-ropes. Fatigue parties of 200 men were at work until midnight, and on the morning of the 15th part of the baggage was still on the left bank.

Some hours after midday Major Gorringe and Lieutenant Chester Master rode back from the bivouac of the cavalry division, whither they had been sent during the morning with orders from Lord Kitchener; and their information in conjunction with the report brought in by French's own despatch riders, provided the Commander-in-Chief, now at Waterval, with an accurate description of the state of affairs on the Modder. It was decided that the 6th Division, in spite of their morn-

[1] French's whereabouts do not seem to have been known to the Headquarter Staff in the early morning of the 14th, the field telegraph having been destroyed by the veldt fire on the preceding day, and his report carried by two volunteers not having come in. Relays had been established at Rooidam and Blaauwboschpan for the purposes of communication (German Staff account p. 17).

[2] Presumably the immediate object of this march was to protect the left flank against an attack from Jacobsdal. It ensured, however, other advantages. It made way for the 9th Division and convoy, placed the 6th Division nearer to the Modder drifts, and, unless the enemy engaged his main body in the defence of Jacobsdal, ensured the reopening of communication with Methuen and the railway through that village. As the Wegdraai route was afterwards followed by the 7th and 9th Divisions, it is highly probable that the abundant water supply of the river played a large part in the choice of the Commander-in-Chief. It is perhaps worth noting that the line from Honeynest Kloof to Jacobsdal would, as events turned out, have been a safer and shorter one for the ox convoy to have taken. That it did not do so is probably to be attributed to uncertainty as to when it would be possible, or from the point of view of alarming Cronje desirable, to occupy Jacobsdal, a point which the enemy were not likely to abandon without a fight. The water on the Honeynest Kloof-Jacobsdal route may also have been deficient.

ing's march to Wegdraai, should move again in the evening, and making their way across the veldt to Klip Drift, occupy the passage, and set free the cavalry for the relief of Kimberley. Preparations were made at once, and as soon as the baggage animals, which had arrived during the afternoon were fed and watered, the infantry started. The division moved in two detachments, accompanied by three regiments of mounted infantry and a few colonials, the first consisting of the main body of the infantry, the second of the West Riding Regiment and the baggage. With the first column rode Lord Kitchener [1] and General Kelly-Kenny; and in spite of their weariness the men responded gallantly to their leader's appeal and stepped out bravely into the fast gathering night. With many deviations, for the changes of direction were frequent, the column plodded on across the undulating plain under the guidance of Gorringe; getting drenched to the skin by a heavy thunderstorm, which burst over them when about half of the distance had been covered. But through the blackness could be seen the vigilant play of the searchlight at Kimberley, and heedless of the storm and of their fatigue, the sturdy infantrymen trudged steadily onward. At 1 a.m., after an eight hours march of fully fifteen miles, the leading column reached the cavalry camp; the rear half of the division, which had waited at Wegdraai until the head of Tucker's division marched in from De Kiel Drift,[2] did not arrive until seven hours later.

Before French began his advance the 13th Brigade occupied the kopjes on the north bank of the Modder, and looked on while the cavalry broke through to Abonsdam. For the rest of the day, with the exception of some slight skirmishing on the part of the Mounted Infantry, the troops on the Modder did nothing. The fatigue of the men, the necessity of holding the drifts, and the uncertainty of the result of the cavalry movement, put any extended infantry operations out of the question. But there is little doubt that by mounted reconnaissances [3] something might have been effected towards ascertaining the

[1] The former had joined the 6th Division during the march to Wegdraai.

[2] Tucker had left De Kiel Drift at 6 p.m. on the evening of the 14th.

[3] The Mounted Infantry had not been placed under the orders of General Kelly-Kenny. This may explain why on the 16th they seem to have taken their orders from Lord Kitchener.

positions of the enemy and scouring the stretch of country between Klip Drift and Abonsdam. The exhaustion of men and horses, and the first marches of the newly organised Mounted Infantry tried both severely, can hardly be advanced as sufficient excuses for the omission of this duty. Similarly it would probably have been advisable to place one or two posts on the hills through which French had ridden in the morning. Nothing of the kind seems to have been done. Only the kopjes commanding the drifts were held, and under their shelter the entire force bivouacked.[1]

We must return for a moment to the Mounted Infantry, which we left at Roodepan on the night of the 11th of February after the action at Wolvekraal. Next day, with his entire force,[2] Hannay reached Ramdam, where the New Zealanders, part of Kitchener's Horse, and Porter's squadrons left him to join the cavalry at De Kiel's Drift. On the 13th he bivouacked at Waterval Drift, and on the same evening pushed a reconnoitring force of two companies of Mounted Infantry under Captain Dewar towards De Kiel's Drift and Koffyfontein in the hope of locating the Boers who had fought at Wolvekraal and on the Riet. These men were known to be hovering upon the outer flank of the army, and were reported to have been reinforced from Colesberg. But no enemy was discovered, the reconnaissance was withdrawn, and the rear of the army was left unprotected.[3]

On the 14th Hannay moved out with the New South Wales troops and four battalions of Mounted Infantry, to cover the march of the 6th Division to Wegdraai, and pushing back a few scouting

[1] The German Staff History attributes the neglect of these precautions to General Kelly-Kenny's ignorance of the situation, and of Lord Roberts's intentions; and is of the opinion that the principle of keeping the plan of operations secret was pushed too far (p. 41).

[2] 2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th Mounted Infantry, New South Wales Mounted Infantry, New Zealand Mounted Rifles, Kitchener's Horse, Rimington's Guides (detachment), and Porter's Cavalry.

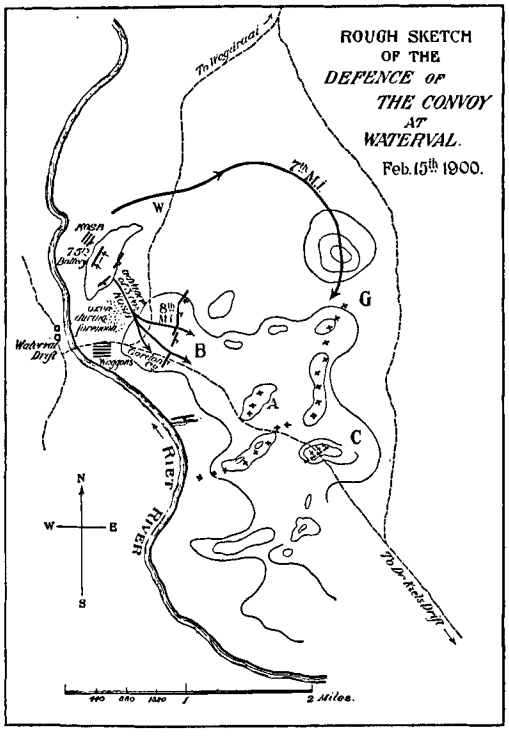
[3] Hence it is not true to say, as is stated in the German Staff History, that no attempt was made to locate De Wet. But it is clear that more troops should have been employed; that the Koffyfontein district should have been thoroughly scouted until his whereabouts had been ascertained; and that once found he should have been kept under observation until the flank march had been safely accomplished. No doubt the want of divisional cavalry, and the inefficiency of the new Mounted Infantry in extended reconnaissance greatly increased the difficulty of carrying out these precautions.

parties of the enemy, reached his bivouac without fighting. During the afternoon two companies of the 4th Mounted Infantry under Colonel Henry entered Jacobsdal without firing a shot; but while he was in the village some of the Dutch residents seem to have sent word to a party of the enemy, who attacked him during his withdrawal. He extricated his force, but was himself wounded in the shoulder and captured. The Boers chased the detachment until it was reinforced with infantry, whereupon they ceased to press, and contented themselves with sniping. Desultory firing was kept up on both banks of the river during the afternoon, and the 81st Battery was sent out by General Kelly-Kenny, but did not come into action. Towards evening the skirmish came to an end, the British losses amounting to eight killed and wounded.

That night the whole of the Mounted Infantry, with the exception of the 5th and part of Kitchener's Horse, which bivouacked at Wegdraai, marched with the 6th Division to the Modder. At daybreak on the following morning Lord Roberts, with the 7th Mounted Infantry, rode to Wegdraai, whither he was followed by the 9th Division, which had received orders to push on without waiting for the large convoy. Before the Royal Commission the Field-Marshal stated that seeing the difficulties of the Riet passage, he sent instructions before he left Waterval that all waggons which had not crossed were to return to Ramdam. The messenger, it must be concluded, lost his way in a dust storm, for the order was never delivered, nor was the fact of its non-delivery made known to the Commander-in-Chief. The result was, that believing the waggons to have gone back, he "left only the ordinary rear-guard" at Waterval when he started for Wegdraai.[1] This account does not altogether explain the insufficiency of the escort. Even supposing that the whole or part of the convoy was in march to Ramdam, the fact of its being on the left bank of the Riet did not place it beyond the reach of attack. Tucker's Division having marched to Wegdraai, De Kiel's Drift was undefended, and there was at least one point between it and Koffyfontein by which De Wet could cross the river. The danger of attack, even on the left bank, was therefore not inconsiderable, and

[1] Commission, 10843.

ought to have been provided against. It was greatly increased when, without Lord Roberts's knowledge, the convoy made the passage. By the morning of the 15th practically the whole of it was parked on the right bank. The only vehicles which had not crossed were a few waggons loaded with sick and wounded, which were under orders to return to Enslin. This change in the position of the convoy lends colour to the contention of the German Staff History that, while it is



evident that the Headquarters Staff underrated the likelihood of attack and committed a fault in prescribing, at General Colvile's request, the strength of the escort that it considered necessary, the commander of the 9th Division must also be blamed for his want of independence and dread of responsibility. He knew, what Lord Roberts did not know, that the convoy was on the right bank; and had he had doubts as to the sufficiency of the escort laid down by Headquarters, he should, on his own initiative, have reinforced it. As a matter of fact—though whether this was due to design or not the evidence does not show—

the force left at Waterval exceeded the 200 men that had been deemed sufficient.[1] It consisted of three companies of the 8th Mounted Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel Ross, which had been the last of the new corps to be organised, and had only reached Waterval after dark on the preceding evening; about fifty men belonging to other corps, and one company of Gordon Highlanders. The whole was under the command of Colonel Ridley. Thus by 10 a.m. on the morning of the 15th there were about 350 men with the convoy; and no other troops were within ten miles of Waterval Drift.

Since the evening of the 12th, De Wet had lain in hiding near Koffyfontein, successfully eluding our patrols and closely watching the ponderous advance of the British army. In so acting he was deliberately disobeying Cronje's orders "to drive back the enemy," and with the exception of the sending of Scheepers and Lubbe, had done nothing to interfere with the decisive movement of French, or to enable his slow and obstinate chief to realise the seriousness of the situation. Had he hurried back to the Modder he might have effectively delayed the seizure of its drifts and given another turn to the campaign; in any case, his duty was to harass and check the main British forces. His failure to do so was an error characteristic of a man who was more of a tactician than a strategist. Chance, or rather the omission to provide the convoy with a sufficient escort, now gave him an opportunity better suited to his genius. On the 14th he had watched the long waggon train approaching Waterval, but had been prevented from attacking it by the presence of Colvile's division. During the night, or possibly still earlier, he moved westward along the right bank of the Riet, and by daybreak on the 15th must have reached the broken kopjes between Waterval and De Kiel, within sight of the British camps. From this standpoint at 4 a.m. he saw the last column of Colvile's division march away to Wegdraai. He waited until it should be too far to send prompt assistance, and then rode forward to the attack of the convoy.

[1] See "Work of the 9th Division," p. 26. On the afternoon of the 14th General Colvile's brigade-major received an order to "leave the ox-transport behind with a 'suitable' escort, as Lord Roberts did not wish it to march by day." On inquiry as to the meaning of "suitable," Major Ewart was informed that 200 men would be enough.

Waterval Drift lies at the north-western foot of the wedge of broken hills that extends between it and De Kiel. The ground begins to mount within half a mile of the crossing and reaches its highest points about two miles to the east and south-east. To the north and north-west the road to Wegdraai runs through a comparatively flat plain offering no commanding positions. At daybreak on the 15th the great mass of the supply-waggons were parked on the right bank a few hundred yards east of the drift; the convoy of sick and wounded, and some Mounted Infantry baggage were still on the left bank. Part of the North Staffordshire company of Mounted Infantry was occupying the high ridge C to the south-east; 80 Gordon Highlanders were on the lower spur B in front of the waggons; and the remainder of the escort, 250 Mounted Infantry, were in bivouac near the river. No patrols seem to have been sent out.

Soon after daybreak[1] the party on the ridge C were rushed by the enemy, Lieutenant Ritchie and some of his men killed, and the others captured. As soon as the alarm was given a small party was thrown out to the right along the river bank, and most of the remaining Mounted Infantry were pushed up to support the Gordons. The Boers occupied C with two field guns and a pompom, seized a spur in front A with a few riflemen, and took up a series of positions to the right or north. So placed they opened a steady fire with guns and rifles upon the infantry, but the range was long and, as the enemy made no attempt to press forward, the casualties were few.

Thus far the oxen had been grazing to the north-east of the drift, out of reach of the enemy's fire, and it is probable that few or none would have been lost had not an ill-advised attempt been made to inspan the waggons. As the animals were driven in the enemy concentrated their fire upon them, killing many and putting the drivers to flight. Deprived of their conductors the helpless beasts remained exposed for the rest of the day to the enemy's shot. Some of the team were destroyed, some wandered away into the Boer positions,

[1] *I.e.*, about 7 a.m. Some accounts place the hour as late as 9 a.m. This difference would be partly accounted for by the time which would have elapsed before the fate of the outpost was known, and the Boer attack had developed.

and the rest became hopelessly mixed. By sunset most of the drivers had disappeared, many oxen had been lost, and the convoy was temporarily demobilised.[1]

Meanwhile the escort held their ground stoutly; and fears of actual defeat vanished when a little before noon Colonel Bainbridge with the 7th Mounted Infantry regiment came up from Wegdraai. Following him, though at considerable intervals, were the 18th Field Battery and the 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers, all sent back by Lord Roberts as soon as he heard of the attack. Bainbridge reconnoitred towards the enemy's position, and coming under a very hot fire, sent most of his men to shelter near the river-bank; and to recover from the fatigues of the march. Shortly afterwards the battery arrived, and was at once ordered to shell the enemy's positions, while the Mounted Infantry moved off to turn the enemy's right towards G. About 2 p.m. the infantry battalion came up and was directed to co-operate by advancing against the enemy's centre. For some reason this attack was not pressed. Three companies moved up to reinforce the Gordon Highlanders, two remained on escort to the battery, three stayed in reserve behind it and never came into action.[2] The Mounted Infantry, whose horses had covered nearly thirty miles made slow progress. It was about 5 p.m. before the battalion, moving past G, dismounted to attack; and at that time the bulk of the infantry were still near the battery. The lateness of the hour made the original plan impracticable, and the mounted troops retired upon the guns, luckily escaping with only two casualties. A little later the enemy fell back from their position at A, but they occupied those in rear throughout the night, their pompom occasionally firing upon the outposts.

At nightfall the Hampshire Regiment arrived, and was shortly followed by General Tucker with the remainder of the 14th Brigade, which took open order facing the Boer positions and lay down on the veldt ready to attack at daybreak. But during the night contrary orders were issued; the sick convoy was sent to Enslin, the remaining baggage

[1] It is hardly necessary to remind our readers that the efficiency of ox-transport depends entirely upon the skill of the drivers and the order in which the different pairs of oxen are placed.

[2] All the troops seem to have been greatly exhausted by the heat.

was brought across the river, and the whole force, including the waggon escort, abandoned the convoy, and covered by the Mounted Infantry fell back to Wegdraai.

The evening before General Tucker had been commissioned by Lord Roberts not to attempt to save the waggons, if the operation was likely to cost much time or many troops. On reaching the drift the commander of the 7th Division, after consultation with the transport officer, came to the conclusion that to render the convoy mobile would require several days, during which an escort of at least a brigade of infantry, with a proportion of the other arms, would be necessary to ensure its safety. He therefore resolved to leave it and rejoin the army.[1]

The responsibility for this decision, which of course rested primarily with Lord Roberts, was a heavy one; and had De Wet been opposed to a man of weaker fibre his capture might have had results far exceeding those which he actually obtained or deserved. As events turned out, there seems no reason for supposing that the temporary detainment of a brigade of infantry would have wrecked Lord Roberts's plan of campaign. Exclusive of Methuen's troops he had still five brigades of infantry, three at Wegdraai and two at Klip Drift, available for the main operation, exactly the number that were ultimately employed in Cronje's capture. He might have counted with some confidence on being able to employ part of Lord Methuen's force as well. The brigade, too, which had been detached to Waterval was the furthest in rear of all the infantry units, and its temporary absence from the front endangered no important point. The news of French's entry into Kimberley must have reached Headquarters some hours prior to Tucker's withdrawal from Waterval; so that for the moment, at any rate, the safety of the division was assured. But Lord Roberts had still to reckon with the independent will of the enemy; French's movement in some degree committed him to a further advance; his information may have led him to exag-

[1] It is an open question whether the greater portion of the convoy could not have been saved without undue loss of time. The Boers, with the help of the 2,800 oxen they succeeded in collecting, managed to remove the waggons during the course of the 16th. It must be remembered, however, that they were consummate ox-drivers.

gerate the numbers of the Boers north of the Modder, and he was well aware that a powerful force might be thrown on his flank from the direction of Colesberg. Nor was he likely to forget that the superior mobility of the enemy rendered them more than a match for an equal number of his infantry; and that if it became a question of intercepting their retreat, the more points he could occupy in strength the more likely he was to succeed. So judging he had no mind to weaken or delay the blow which he was straining every nerve to render decisive, or to diminish the success which French's position in rear of the Boer army had placed within his grasp. His reasons for continuing the march must have been strong, for it was an alternative that many commanders would have shrunk from choosing. To relinquish the convoy was to reduce his immediate supplies to three days' full rations in food and forage, two carried with the mule-waggons, one on the man and horse, besides the emergency ration which was only intended to be eaten under the direst stress of hunger.[1] Moreover, by withdrawing from Waterval he would leave unmolested a hostile force close to his own line of communication; and worse still, by the abandonment of the waggons and oxen he would lose the means of bringing up fresh supplies from the railway. And all this in an enemy's country which offered no means of replenishment, and on the eve of movements involving long marches and probably hard fighting. The soldier who in such straits could still keep his eyes firmly fixed upon the main object, and advance in face of the risk of partial or complete starvation, was a man of no common courage, and possessed of no ordinary confidence in himself and his troops. Arrangements were at once made to replenish the supplies from Honeynest Kloof and Modder River, where one hundred ox-waggons were waiting ready-laden; and orders were issued for the temporary reduction of the bread and grocery ration. At 2 a.m. on the morning of the 16th he

[1] The supplies lost at Waterval were 140,000 rations of food and 24,000 of forage, about three days' supply for the whole of the army. The captured waggons amounted to three-tenths of the ox-transport which had been concentrated on the western line. Of the remainder, 125 waggons carried ammunition, 295 food and forage. It must be supposed that these last were behind the army at Orange River or on the line of the railway at the moment of the disaster at Waterval. For an estimate of the consequences of the loss see Chapter XV.

announced to his anxious Staff that he had decided to continue the advance.[1]

The army was indeed to advance, but not at the time or in the direction which its commander contemplated. On the fateful night on which he resolved to abandon the convoy, the event took place which he must long have expected, and on the issue of which everything hung. Cronje had at last abandoned Magersfontein.

It was not through want of warning that the enemy's general had remained so long inactive. Up till the evening of the 12th, indeed, it is conceivable that there might still have been some cause for uncertainty as to the object of the English advance; for it was possible to regard the seizure of the Riet drifts as a feint, designed to cover the direct march of the army on Bloemfontein. Such, at any rate, was the view taken in the Boer bulletin reporting the action. But Cronje, though he held another opinion, namely, that French's advance was merely a raid, had no ground for his belief beyond the obstinacy of his preconceptions. During the next twenty-four hours two trustworthy eye-witnesses came in to assure him of his danger. Hearing a report of English movements in the direction of Jacobsdal on the 11th, Count Sternberg had ridden out towards the Riet on the following morning, and had been present when the cavalry seized the passages. The practised eye of the European soldier soon caught the significance of French's operations. He estimated his force at 6,000 men and 18 guns, and well aware that so powerful a body would not be employed in the mere raiding of a secondary line of supply,[2] galloped back to Jacobsdal, narrowly escaping capture at the hands of Gordon's Lancers on his way. At 7 p.m. he saw Cronje and told him what he had seen. "Only cavalry, whom we shoot and capture," was the reply. Sternberg pointed out that the advance of the English undoubtedly implied an enveloping movement, and that he must do something to protect the Modder Drifts, but

[1] Report of American attaché. The German Staff History says: "When the bad news arrived even Lord Roberts at first thought of stopping the further advance. The rapidity with which the commander-in-chief regained his equilibrium deserves recognition."

[2] Cronje's main line of supply ran through Jacobsdal to Bloemfontein. Another lay through Koffyfontein and Fauresmith.

Cronje merely laughed and declared that the enemy could never march so far. Not many hours later arrived Commandant Scheepers, sent by De Wet to convey a similar warning, which was equally disregarded.

In the afternoon of the 13th Sternberg again rode in with news of the English advance. Cronje was absent at Magersfontein; but his secretary explained that the burghers must not be needlessly excited, and took no steps to oppose the cavalry. Before the Austrian officer could return to the Modder, French had arrived, and the news of the capture of the small laagers on the bank had thrown the commandos into a state of wild confusion. Boers on foot and on horseback were hurrying along towards the drifts, and there was some random firing. In the gathering dusk Sternberg saw the pursuit of Broadwood's and Gordon's brigades, and the movement of large bodies of Boers from Magersfontein: night came down on a scene of clamour and uncertainty. Surely Cronje would realise his danger, and retreat before the enemy struck at his flank and rear! But the Boer general not only refused to fall back, but, stranger still, seems to have made no attempt to act effectively on the 14th while the cavalry were still unsupported.[1] On the same day President Steyn's brother rode in to ask for men to defend Jacobsdal, then threatened by Kelly-Kenny and the Mounted Infantry, and also met with a refusal from his obstinate commander. "He could not extend his line of operations in that way." Even the news of the first British entry into the village was received "as if it were a good joke." In the afternoon Cronje himself went out to reconnoitre, but would not be persuaded of the seriousness of his position until late in the evening, when the advance of large bodies of infantry convinced him of the necessity of immediate action. That night some of the camps were shifted, and next morning a real attempt was made to check the cavalry. Its failure ended in a disorderly flight as far as the Magersfontein trenches; and a feeling approaching to panic spread fast through the laagers. Late in the afternoon Count Sternberg entered Cronje's tent, and saw at a glance that the stubborn Boer had at last realised the desperate nature of the

[1] French's position was a strong one, but the immobility of Cronje's main body is not easy to understand.

situation. He was sitting motionless, "broken" by the blow, his faithful wife stroking his head. Men entered and suggested holding a council of war; but he refused, saying that he could not recall the officers from their commands at such a moment. At last an informal discussion took place, various suggestions were made, one of which was "to fly to Boshof and leave Kimberley to take care of itself." Finally retreat was decided on, though whether it was then or later that the Bloemfontein direction was chosen Count Sternberg does not say.[1]

The bitter decision once taken, Cronje showed all the stern energy of his character, and for the rest of the campaign seems not once to have faltered. In spite of the confusion which reigned in the laagers, of which ample witness was visible when Methuen occupied the empty position on the following day, the Boer General managed during the evening to inspan most of his waggons near Brown's Drift, and with about 6,000 men and 150 women and children marched due eastward, some four miles to the north of the river, across the front of the 6th Division. For some of the commandos it must have been a twenty-mile trek, but the instancy of the crisis drove them on, and by dawn on the 16th the head of the long train was approaching Klip Kraal Drift, six miles to the east of Kelly-Kenny's position. The tail of the column, marked by long-drawn clouds of dust, was just clearing the track made by the cavalry on the day before. Unobserved by his opponents, Cronje had by a great effort gained an open line of retreat. But the state of his oxen obliged him to pause; and he had still to do with an enemy who as fully equalled him in energy and resolution as he surpassed him in strategic insight and rapidity.

Late on the previous afternoon, though perhaps rather earlier than the arrival of the news of French's entry into Kimberley, General Kelly-Kenny had intercepted a message from Cronje to Steyn, to the effect that the "cavalry had got round him, and he could not hold on." But the direction in which he proposed to retreat was still

[1] The German Staff History says of this decision :—"Of all the lines of retreat still open to him this was the most unfavourable. . . . The choice of this direction seems to have been decided by the wish to join the Boers who were operating in the north of Cape Colony. The water-question seems also to have influenced him."

unknown, and in spite of the presence of the cavalry division at Kimberley, it still seemed quite as probable that the Boer general would move upon the more broken country about Boshof, as that for political reasons he would attempt to re-establish a direct communication with Bloemfontein by running the gauntlet along the bank of the Modder. It was necessary at any rate that provision should be made to meet both contingencies, and in the orders issued on the evening of the 15th, General Kelly-Kenny[1] seems to have taken both into account. If Cronje did not appear, the Mounted Infantry, which were to be supported in their march through the kopjes near the river-bank by the 13th Brigade of Infantry and the 81st Field Battery, were to push on and join French; if the Boer army was found in their front a reconnaissance would take place and fresh orders would be issued. The mounted troops were directed to start at 3 a.m. without baggage or carts, carrying 150 rounds of ammunition and three days' supplies.[2]

A little after the appointed hour Hannay moved out of camp, taking the route followed by the Cavalry Division on the preceding day. The 6th Mounted Infantry regiment and a detachment of Rimington's Guides led the column, sending out a squadron and a party of the Guides to cover the advance. Behind them came Kitchener's Horse,[3] the 2nd Mounted Infantry regiment, and the New South Wales Mounted Rifles under Captain Antill. The 4th Mounted Infantry Regiment seems to have furnished a guard on the left, the flank on which it was most likely that Cronje would be discovered. After the mounted troops, but at an appreciable interval,[4] came the 81st Field Battery and the 13th Brigade of Infantry, the 1st Oxfordshire Light Infantry leading,[5] followed by the 2nd East Kent

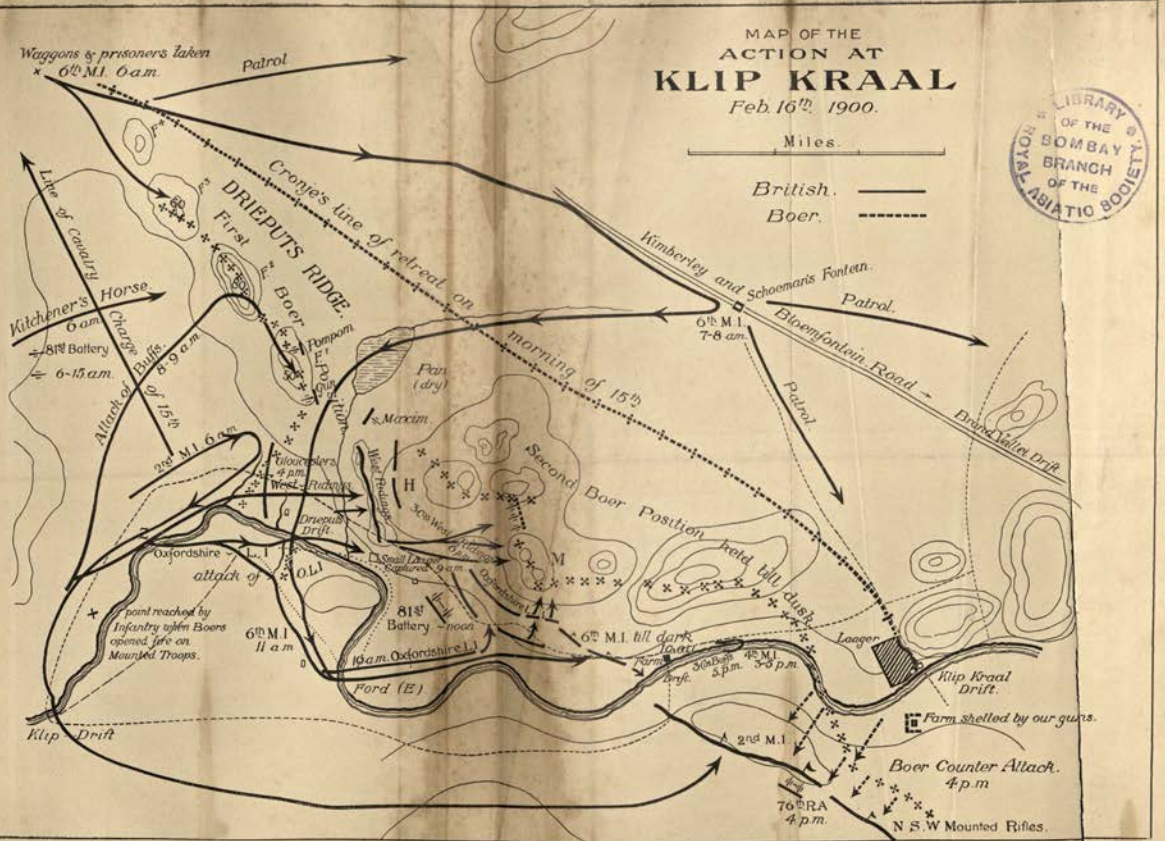
[1] As senior officer General Kelly-Kenny was in command. As regards the position occupied by Lord Kitchener, see Chapter XIV., p. 397.

[2] Most of the forage was left on the veldt, as the horses could not carry it, their nose-bags being only made to hold one day's supply.

[3] Some of Kitchener's Horse were at Wegdraai; and one squadron left to hold the wells at Blaauwboschpan between Riet and Modder had been captured by De Wet on the day before, during his retirement from Waterval. Probably not more than 200 were present at Klip Drift.

[4] Knox's brigade did not start till 4 a.m.

[5] Some accounts state that the 2nd East Kent Regiment led. On the whole the evidence inclines to the opposite view.



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Regiment, the 1st West Riding Regiment, and the 2nd Gloucestershire Regiment. Each of these battalions had given up a company to the mounted infantry, and the last named was still further reduced by the absence of two companies on outpost duty. The 18th Brigade of Infantry, three battalions strong,[1] and the 76th Field Battery, remained to guard the approaches to Klip Drift.

Owing no doubt to the darkness and the presumed proximity of the enemy, the advance was slow, and it was close upon 6 a.m. when in the dim light of the dawn the advanced scouts caught sight of long banks of dust to north and north-east of the low line of ironstone kopjes which formed the eastern boundary of the valley up which French had charged.[2] Some important movement was evidently in progress, and instinctively De Lisle's and Rimington's men wheeled to the right, and galloping forward, struck upon several broken-down waggons in the hollow through which the cavalry had passed. A few rapid queries addressed to their owners confirmed the suspicion that the apparition was Cronje's force in hasty retreat. Messengers rode back at once with the all-important intelligence. From the high ground in front of Klip Drift the Staff had also seen the rising dust, and on the arrival of the news brought in by the scouts it was determined to attack the enemy without a moment's delay.

But before Lord Kitchener's brief order, "Objective changed, go for the convoy," reached the mounted troops three miles to the northward, their leaders had already acted. Far on the left De Lisle dashed forward and occupied the northernmost kopje (F3 4) without opposition. In the centre, where some delay had occurred before Colonel Hannay and the battery commander could be informed of the new development, the enemy had had time to occupy the ridge (F2), and checked the advance of Kitchener's Horse with a heavy fire. Farther to the south the 2nd Mounted Infantry Regiment had galloped for the point where the kopjes sloped to the river, and had likewise been obliged to halt. Men looked round for the guns, and just at this moment the 81st came up and sprinkled the bouldered crests with

[1] The 2nd Warwickshire Regiment had been left at Orange River to guard the line of communication.

[2] F1, 2, 3, and 4 in map.

shrapnel. The infantry, still some way behind, began to deploy, the Buffs moving towards the kopjes which had stopped Kitchener's Horse, the Oxfordshire Light Infantry advancing between them and the river. Away beyond the ridge that stood between it and capture, the dust of the Boer convoy still rolled upwards as the ox-drivers urged on their jaded beasts towards the shelter of the massive bluffs that overlooked the Klip Kraal drift.

With intense eagerness and not a little impatience the British Generals must have contrasted the slow progress of their troops with the rapid retreat of the great dust-cloud. With his usual skill in the choice of a position the enemy had occupied during the night[1] the one ridge that could avert disaster, but the respite was only momentary, and there was still a chance of intercepting the convoy if the covering position could be rapidly turned. The course of the river appeared to favour such a scheme. If the mounted troops could be brought round to the south bank and pushed rapidly across the neck of the great river-bend it was possible that they might hold Cronje fast until support arrived. The advantages of such a movement, which kept the British force united, threatened the Boer line of retreat, and avoided the Klip Kraal kopjes, were obvious; and at about 6.30 a.m., Lord Kitchener sent orders that the mounted infantry were to return to the southern bank.[2]

Meanwhile Knox's foremost battalions were drawing near the enemy, who held not merely the ridge but the space between it and the river, the river-bed and the dongas on both banks. A gun and a pompom were in action on the southernmost kopje, and covered every approach with fire in spite of the efforts of the 81st Battery which shelled their supposed positions with vigour. The quickest and therefore the best way of clearing the position was to turn it; and at half-past six the Oxfordshire Light Infantry received orders to cross the stream so as to outflank the enemy's left. In the waist-high current at a point

[1] The Boers had cooked their food behind this position. Had it been occupied by British posts on the evening of the 15th, intelligence of the Boer movement would have been gained much earlier, and Cronje's difficulties greatly increased. We have already referred to the inaction of the Mounted Infantry on that day.

[2] Lord Kitchener seems to have given his orders directly to the Mounted Infantry.

where sheets of rock gave some foothold, the men waded across under a smart fire, carrying and dragging with them the machine gun and its carriage. The left bank reached, two companies advanced in extended order across the open; another, eventually supported by two more, crept along the thickly-bushed river-bed; the rest remained in reserve. Side by side with the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, but on the right bank, moved the West Riding Regiment; and the two battalions advancing by rushes from donga to donga began to drive back the snipers near the river. The support of two companies of Gloucesters, which had been sent across the river to assist the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, was not necessary, and slowly but without an appreciable check, the leading companies pushed on to the eastern angle of the river-bend, capturing on their way a few of the enemy's waggons.

The difficulties of this advance would certainly have been aggravated had the Boers on the southern kopje been free to enfilade the advancing infantry. But at an early hour their attention was wholly taken up by the Buffs. Moving with great dash, Captain Macdonall with one company cleared the central kopje (F^2) with the loss of an officer and six men; the rest of the battalion following him wheeled to the right and gained the southern (F^1) hill without loss, 200 of the enemy beating a hasty retreat as the Buffs rushed in. Thus by 9 a.m. the entire position was captured at the trifling cost of nine men.

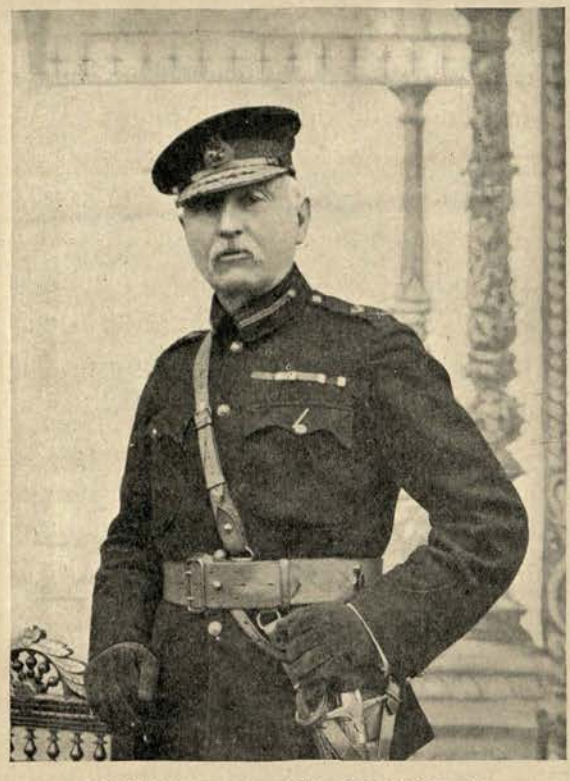
But the enemy had accomplished their object. They had only held the Drieputs ridge in order to gain time for the occupation of the formidable kopjes west of Klip Kraal Drift, and slight as had been their resistance, it had cost the British three invaluable hours. By the time that the scattered companies of the West Ridings and Oxfordshire were reformed and ready to advance, the Boer waggons were in laager at Klip Kraal; and Commandant Roos, who was in charge of Cronje's rearguard, and fought with brilliant skill throughout the day, held an excellent covering position some four miles in length. His right commanded a good field of fire to the north, and dominated the ground now occupied by the British infantry; his centre overlooked all the ground north of the river; and his left was strongly posted in the river-bed west of Klip Kraal, and in the dongas on

both banks. Far in the rear, on the northern bank, could be seen the white mass of the laager. The main position consisted of two principal groups of kopjes, running roughly north-west and south-east. the most conspicuous being the massive hill four miles west of Klip Kraal Drift (M).[1] On this were placed the Boer artillery. So situated the enemy was able to bring rifle-fire, and at some points shell-fire as well, to bear upon troops approaching the river, or trying to turn their flanks; to observe and anticipate attack on either wing or centre, and to conceal their own movements on the hills as completely as the British were obliged to expose theirs on the comparatively flat ground on both sides of the stream. Moreover the deep bed concealed the enemy's sharpshooters; and the river itself, being only passable at a very few points owing to the depth of its current and the extreme steepness of its banks, was a most serious obstacle to the attacking troops.

Lord Kitchener's determination to attack the position on the southern side is, as we have seen above, easily intelligible. It was the obvious line to choose, and as he could not see the northern side he cannot be blamed for adopting it; yet he would probably have done better to attack the opposite end of the Boer position with the whole of the Mounted Infantry, and endeavour to hem Cronje's force against the river and the 6th Division. Early in the morning such a disposition was possible. After their occupation of the northernmost kopje of the Drieputs Ridge, the 6th Mounted Infantry had pushed on round the enemy's right flank and rear, and between 8 and 9 a.m. had reached the farm of Schoemans Fontein, some three miles to the north-east of Roos' second position. Patrols were pushed out, and one of these drew fire from the enemy in the direction of Klip Kraal. Had an advance in force from this point upon the enemy's rear taken place, the Mounted Infantry might have played a part similar to that performed by the Cavalry on the following day, and the scene

[1] The position allotted by different accounts to Klip Kraal Drift varies considerably. It will be seen that there was a drift near the Farm (V), and this and not the more eastern drift marked on the map may have been Klip Kraal. In any case the Boer left extended a great distance along the bank in order to ensure the safety of the laager.

of Cronje's surrender might have been Klip Kraal, and not Paardeberg But De Lisle was shortly recalled by Lord Kitchener's second order, and moving round the enemy's new position crossed the Drieputs Drift under shell fire at 11 a.m. At the same hour the 4th Mounted Infantry Regiment repassed the stream at Klip Drift, whither Martyr's Regiment and the New South Wales Mounted Rifles had preceded them; and the 81st Battery, which had returned to the same point as soon as the



LIEUTENANT-GENERAL KELLY-KENNY.

Drieputs Ridge was cleared, recrossed the river at the ford (E) in the bend south-west of the main kopje (M) and came into action behind the infantry who were now attacking the Boer centre.

Soon after the first phase of the fight was over, two companies of the Gloucester Regiment had moved against some part of the north-western group of kopjes (H). They were received by a heavy fire, and as no artillery was at hand to support them and they

were in some danger of being isolated, they were withdrawn under cover of some companies of the Buffs, then holding a position in front of the ridge (F1) which they had captured. The Gloucester companies fell back in fine order under a hail of bullets, and afterwards joined the Buffs in their advance up the river-bed. A little later the battalions in the first line began to develop their attack on the western and southern fronts of the new position. The Oxfordshire Light Infantry reformed at the drift (E) about 9 a.m., and were directed to push on up stream. Moving by a road running between the main kopje and the river, they got within 1,500 yards of the enemy's riflemen, came under a very hot fire and wheeling to the left advanced in extended order up the hill. But after some distance had been covered the enemy's resistance strengthened, and orders were received to halt. Later on two companies attempted to turn the Boer left, but the enemy moved to meet them, and they too had to lie down. With the exception of one company which was sent to the right to occupy the farm (V) south-east of the main hill, the battalion made no further movement. All day it remained clinging to the side of the hill, under a continuous fire, and at dark bivouacked where it lay. It had suffered 52 casualties, nearly one half of the loss of the entire force.

A little later than the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, the West Riding Regiment also moved forward against the north-western group of hills (H), from the front of which the two companies of Gloucesters had been withdrawn. Two companies were sent to occupy a subsidiary ridge 1,600 yards distant from the Boer position, and were shortly followed by the rest of the battalion, which extended in support under cover of the rocky outcrop. Early in the afternoon two more companies went into the firing-line and swept with fire the nek between the two groups of hills; and late in the day, in conjunction with a third company of their own battalion and supported by the main body of the Gloucesters, this detachment worked close up under the eastern kopje (M) on the left of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry. The remainder of the battalion with the Maxim still remained under the shelter of the little ridge.

It was evident that any attempt to storm the kopjes would be

attended with very heavy loss, and orders were issued forbidding further advance. Until late in the afternoon no change of moment took place on either side, though the rifle-fire rolled incessantly and the opposing guns remained in vigorous action. The 81st Battery, handicapped by its proximity to the enemy's riflemen, fired 1,100 rounds of shrapnel during the engagement, but it inevitably failed to quell the Mauser fire from so long, so thinly held, and so undefined a front; and though it repeatedly silenced the Boer artillery it never put it permanently out of action. Whenever a mark presented itself, as when the Gloucester Regiment moved up to reinforce the infantry in front or when the Mounted Infantry moving south of the river became visible on the open veldt, the enemy's guns reopened; nor were they withdrawn until the gathering darkness terminated the action.[1]

While the fight stood still on the Boer right and centre, the Mounted Infantry were working round the enemy's left. About midday De Lisle, having left his horses under the river-bank at the ford E, came up on the right of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, suffering considerably from the enemy's fire as he passed along the road behind them. Working eastwards he closed the gap between the farm (V) and the main body of the infantry, but was unable to advance further. At the same hour Martyr, after driving away small parties of the enemy on the south bank, had reached a gentle rise about two miles from Klip Kraal drift, but was met by so heavy a fire that he had to fall back and await reinforcements.

Some two hours afterwards Colonel Hannay, who had come up with the 76th Battery and the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, ordered a fresh advance, and with Martyr moved along the south bank towards the laager, bringing the fire of the battery to bear upon the mass of waggons. Half an hour later he summoned all the Mounted Infantry, with the exception of the 6th, to the same point, and pressed

[1] The sending of the Battery over the river was an error, for it only brought the guns under rifle-fire without proportionately increasing their effect. This seems to have been one of those cases in which the principle of going into decisive range did not apply. It was the more unnecessary because an infantry assault was not intended. We can only find one other instance in the war in which a battery fired as many rounds in a single day. This was the case of G Battery at Magersfontein, which fired 1,153.

forward against the river-bend west of Klip Kraal. But he was not to advance far. At 4 p.m., under cover of a dust storm, the enemy made a most determined counter attack from the direction of their laager and a farm they had occupied on the south bank. Pouring a heavy fire on the Australians, they boldly endeavoured to reach the 76th Battery which had been sent dangerously close to the river; and only the resolute action of the Western Company of Martyr's Regiment under Captain Brooke gained the artillery time to fall back. Hannay now sent orders to the 4th Mounted Infantry Regiment which was ensconced in the river-bed, to retire, presumably with the intention of bringing them round to reinforce his right. But retirement was no easy matter, for the enemy held positions on both banks, and before the greater part of the battalion could lead their horses away dusk was coming on, and it was too late for concerted action. Part of the 4th Mounted Infantry Regiment, under Captain Everitt, tried to get out on to the south bank, and in doing so lost both men and horses. That officer then held the south bank till nightfall, when he retired down-stream, several horses being drowned before he rejoined the remainder of his regiment. De Lisle bivouacked behind the fighting line of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry; Martyr and Antill on the southern bank.[1]

At the same hour that the Mounted Infantry retired, the West Riding Regiment had at last succeeded in occupying the western hills (H). With the help of their machine-gun, which General Knox had sent round to their left front, they were able in some degree to enfilade those crests on which the rifle flashes of the Boers were visible in the gloom of the evening; and as night fell their advanced companies occupied the position and found the enemy gone. For some reason, probably because General Knox at that time contemplated withdrawing the whole brigade to the south bank during the night, these companies were afterwards called in, and the battalion bivouacked on the low ridge it had held during the greater part of the day. The main body of the Gloucesters bivouacked behind them; the Buffs, who early in the afternoon had been sent to reinforce the right, at the farm (V) near

[1] Kitchener's Horse appear to have remained throughout on the north bank.

the river. In view of the wide front covered by the different battalions at nightfall, their ignorance of the river and the badness of the fords General Knox wisely determined not to attempt to recross the river and to defer his junction with the division till the morning.

As it happened nothing was lost by his decision. Roos's fine rear-guard action had gained Cronje twelve hours in which to rest his animals, and shortly after dark his waggons again moved off to the eastwards. As they wound from the river-bank Roos slowly evacuated his positions and when morning broke not a Boer remained in the neighbourhood.[1] The Mounted Infantry, who had been ordered to observe the enemy closely, completely lost touch with them during the night.

To the general plan of the action of Klip Kraal we have already referred. Like all fights which arise out of a sudden change in the situation, its development was necessarily hurried and unsystematic; and these disadvantages were aggravated by the wide area over which it was fought, and the early dispersion of the different units. But it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the want of definite aim and concerted action noticeable in the case of the Mounted Infantry, arose in a large degree from its transference to the south bank, and the want of a strong hand to reunite the scattered troops for effective action. Between the hours of 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. the different mounted corps were hurried forward singly, apparently without any definite plan of co-operation, with the result that out of perhaps 1,200 mounted troops not half were on the decisive spot, the extreme right, at nightfall. No doubt vigorous and concentrated action was rendered exceptionally difficult by the inefficiency of the men, but there appears no adequate reason why, by the time the enemy made their counter attack on Martyr, the 4th and 6th Mounted Infantry Regiments might not also have been on the ground. Whether even then they would have succeeded is another question.[2]

But if the fight had not been so decisive as at one time had been

[1] During the afternoon the Boers on the left of the fighting line had been relieved by fresh men.

[2] The losses of the different corps, so far as we have been able to ascertain them

hoped, it had altered and at the same time defined the whole position of affairs. The exact moment at which Lord Roberts was able to satisfy himself that Cronje's main body had passed Klip Drift we do not know, but it is possible to fix it approximately by reference to his field orders. Early on the morning of the 16th he moved his head-quarters to Jacobsdal, which at four o'clock on the preceding afternoon had been reoccupied after a slight resistance by General Wavell's Brigade (15th), the 75th Battery, and the mounted companies of the City Imperial Volunteers.[1] Arrived in this village, which was now telegraphically connected with Modder River, a severe chill condemned the Commander-in-Chief to temporary inactivity, and from it he dated his orders of the 16th and 17th. The history of the 16th, though very imperfectly known to us, is interesting as an example of the difficulty of correctly solving what afterwards appears an extremely simple problem. Early in the morning a telegraphic report of the encounter with Cronje arrived from Kitchener, who asked that the 9th Division should be immediately sent to Klip Drift, and suggested that the Cavalry should be summoned from Kimberley to intercept the enemy's retreat. But

were as follows:—

	Officers.			Men.		
	K.	W.	M.	K.	W.	M.
13th Brigade 1st Oxfordshire Light Infantry	—	1	—	12	39	—
1st West Riding Regiment	—	2	—	1	27	—
2nd East Kent „	—	1	—	1	5	—
2nd Gloucester „	—	1	—	1	9	—
Mounted Infantry, 2nd Regiment	—	1	—	—	10	—
„ „ 4th „	—	1	—	4	9	—
	—	7	—	19	99	—

Those of the 6th Mounted Infantry, New South Wales Mounted Infantry, Kitchener's Horse, and the Royal Artillery we have not been able to learn. In the case of the Mounted Infantry the difficulty is increased by the inclusion in the casualty lists of the Infantry battalions of Mounted Infantry men originally belonging to them. It is hardly likely that the losses of the above corps were less than thirty. In that case the total would amount to about 150, which exceeds by about forty that published by the War Office. The difference may be accounted for, partly by our having counted Mounted Infantry men, for the above given reason, twice over; partly by the original difficulty of obtaining exact estimates after the action.

[1] Lieut.-Colonel Henry together with the officers and men wounded and captured during the skirmish of the 14th were found in the hospital.

Lord Roberts was not at first convinced that the enemy's main force was in front of Kelly-Kenny—probably conflicting information prevented his obtaining a clear view of the situation—and during the morning no certain intelligence reached him of the abandonment of Magersfontein. Consequently his first order of movements which reached Colvile at midday,[1] directed the 9th Division, one brigade of which had reached Jacobsdal, to march at 3 a.m. on the 17th for Brown's Drift on the Modder, accompanied by its artillery and the C.I.V. Mounted Infantry. If water was available the march was to be pushed further in the direction of Kimberley. The 14th Brigade of the 7th Division, then at Wegdraai, was to move at the same hour to Klip Drift and reinforce the 6th Division. These instructions suggest that Lord Roberts at the time of issue supposed Cronje either to be retreating northward or preparing to fight between the Modder and Kimberley. But the next hours brought enlightenment. At midday Lord Methuen, who in the morning had pushed a reconnaissance under General Pole-Carew towards the Magersfontein trenches, reported that they were empty. This seems to have decided the Field-Marshal; but it was not until 6 p.m.[2] that his aid-de-camp reached Colvile with the order to march at once with his whole division and all the Mounted Infantry[3] then at Wegdraai to Klip Drift and Klip Kraal. The 7th Division was ordered to concentrate on the next day (17th) at Jacobsdal; and Methuen was directed to proceed to Kimberley and to take measures for the military control of the town. Whatever may have been the reasons for the delay in despatching the fresh orders, the evening of the 16th found the Field-Marshal's mind clearly made up. "The latest reports," he wrote, "point to a general retreat of the Boers in the direction of Bloemfontein. It is my intention to follow them up as rapidly as possible, and by taking full advantage of the shock which they have sustained, to break up their organisation as a fighting force."[4]

[1] German Staff History, p. 27.

[2] The order is dated 7.20 p.m.

[3] 7th and 8th Mounted Infantry Regiments.

[4] Despatch No. 2. February 16th. Why an interval of six hours elapsed between the entry of Lord Methuen's report and the new order to Colvile, we are unable to say. Presumably Lord Roberts was waiting for further information. If this was the case, it is possible that a report of a morning's reconnaissance by Captain Chester Master may have

Colvile's brigades, the 19th at Jacobsdal,[1] the Highlanders at Wegdraai, did not succeed owing to transport difficulties in moving before 10 and 11 p.m., and before they reached the Modder Drifts, Kelly-Kenny's infantry were on the move. At 3 a.m. the 6th Division started, the 18th Brigade on the left bank, the 13th on the right. But the movement was retarded by the slowness of the Mounted Infantry, who, as already related, had failed to keep in touch with the enemy, and being considerably dispersed by the action of the preceding day, did not move till 7.30 a.m. From that hour, however, Lord Kitchener personally supervised their employment; and throughout the day his unresting energy drove them on. Antill with his Australians, who had bivouacked further to the eastward than the other troops, at once took up the pursuit, and about 8 a.m. had regained touch with the Boer rearguard three miles east of Brandvallei Drift on the right bank of the river. An hour later the Welsh company of the 6th Mounted Infantry, which had by this time come up, went forward to scout on Antill's right; and these troops, supported by the rest of the regiment, kept in close contact with the enemy as they fell back along the Modder. Not many minutes later a report reached Colonel Hannay that Cronje with 9,000 men and 9 guns was laagered behind the bend west of Paardekop. The Boer camp did not remain stationary for long. In spite of the exhaustion of his oxen their leader once more inspanned and by 11 a.m. his waggons had passed Paardeberg Drift. Meanwhile his rearguard occupied the neighbouring hill and for the rest of the day kept the Mounted Infantry at arm's length with pompom and rifle fire.[2]

But if Cronje hoped to turn the Paardekop into another Klip Kraal he was bitterly undeceived. At the very moment at which Kelly-Kenny moved out of his bivouac at Klip Drift, Broadwood's

reached and influenced him. That officer had ridden early in the morning from Klip Drift to Magersfontein, and had gathered confirmatory evidence of Cronje's retreat. During his ride he made the valuable discovery of 78 Boer waggons abandoned in a dry pan. These waggons afterwards helped to replace those lost at Waterval.

[1] The Naval Brigade was left at Jacobsdal and did not rejoin the division until the 20th.

[2] The German Staff History states that the Mounted Infantry did not discover the enemy during the day. This remark can only apply to Cronje's main body, whose position at evening was still uncertain.

Cavalry Brigade had left Alexandersfontein and throughout the early hours had been riding fast towards Koedoesrand. With equal resolution the indomitable Boer was urging his vast train of waggons with their long teams of groaning oxen towards Wolvekraal Drift. Once the river had been crossed a direct road would be open to Bloemfontein and on the frequent kopjes along the route he would be able to bid defiance to the mounted troops and the tired infantry toiling behind them. Of the approach of the Cavalry he knew nothing.[1] And indeed, cavalry or no cavalry, the hours of danger were approaching their close. Over-driven as his oxen had been during the preceding night[2] they still strained onwards towards the hoped-for crossing; and soon after Hannay's scouts saw the rearmost parties of Boers disappear round the base of Paardekop, the leading waggon was descending the river-bank to the drift. But at this very moment, when escape seemed certain, a shrapnel shell burst above the ford, and on the hills to the northward appeared the dreaded horsemen that Cronje had so long affected to despise.

French's execution of Lord Kitchener's order had been admirably prompt. Within six hours of the start he had covered nearly thirty miles, and his patrols thrown out towards Koedoesrand and Paardeberg Drift had reported dust clouds moving eastward along the line of the river. At 10.15 as the main body crossed the nek of the Kameelfontein ridge four miles from the stream, it caught sight of a large mass of horsemen showing dark against the yellowish-red of its sandy banks. Still uncertain as to their identity the cavalry pressed on into the amphitheatre formed by the kopjes that run from Paardeberg to Koedoesrand, surprised Kameelfontein Farm[3] and took prisoners several Boers, whose statements left no room for doubt that Cronje's whole force was in front, French ordered his main body to water, and pushing out two squadrons to cover his flanks himself, "as

[1] The German Staff History states that Cronje, who had been informed of the exhausting operations round Dronfield on the preceding day, regarded interference on the part of the cavalry as impossible.

[2] At midday they were moving on a broad front across the open veldt, a formation which still further tried their endurance.

[3] See map p. 445.

was his invariable custom,"[1] rode forward to reconnoitre in person. From a low swell of ground, afterwards called Artillery Hill, situated about 2,000 yards from the river-bank, he saw the whole cumbrous length of the waggon train beneath him, and at once sent back a galloper to bring up the guns. Moving at a walk, in order that no dust might betray their presence, G and P Batteries came into action at a quarter-past eleven, and the first shell stopped the convoy dead in its tracks.

The surprise must have been staggering, but the enemy was quick to recover. Four guns replied vigorously to our artillery along the front of their waggons, the ox-trains were outspanned and moved under cover of the bank, and before many minutes had passed a body of horsemen galloped out of the laager and made a dash for a kopje two miles to the right rear of the batteries. But before they could reach it, it was seized by A Squadron of the 10th Hussars, and under a sharp carbine fire the enemy turned and hurried back to the river. The squadron was promptly reinforced by another, and later on by P Battery and the squadron of the 2nd Life Guards.

Meanwhile, on the left flank French had sent a squadron of the 12th Lancers to seize Bank's Drift, a ford south-west of the main crossing at Koedoesrand. But it was found to be occupied by the enemy, and under a hot fire the cavalry had to retire. The chance of blocking the Boer line of retreat became yet more remote, when about 4 p.m. an independent Boer force[2] appeared from the southward, crossed the river at Koedoesrand and occupied with a gun the ridge which runs from the drift to Kameelfontein farmhouse. But though shells fell near the buildings the enemy did not press their attack, and C Squadron of the 12th Lancers supported by a section of guns sufficed to hold them in check.

Thus far French, by resolutely attacking and boldly occupying a disproportionately long front, had prevented the enemy from ascertain-

[1] Captain Cecil Boyle, *Nineteenth Century*.

[2] According to the German Staff History this was Cronje's advanced guard under Fronemann.

ing the weakness of his force,[1] a weakness increased by the exhaustion of the horses which had been all day without any food but the coarse and scanty grass. But the game of bluff could not be played indefinitely, and it was imperatively necessary that he should get into communication with Lord Kitchener. Therefore, when about 5 p.m. Broadwood observed dust rising to the south-west, he directed a squadron of the 10th Hussars to reconnoitre towards a grassy hill,[2] three miles to the right of the kopje[3] they were holding. Unfortunately the horsemen got within short range of the hill before they realised it was held, and came under a heavy converging fire, a pom-pom joining in from one of the hills to the west.[4] Before the squadron could extricate itself two men and ten horses had been killed and nine men wounded, and with this abortive attempt to join hands with the Infantry, active operations for the day terminated.

The Boer artillery had long ceased to reply to our guns, and although a good many shells were at first thrown into the laager, our batteries had to be sparing with their ammunition; and in the afternoon the cannonade dwindled to an occasional shot fired to keep the enemy from moving. Evening found both sides in their positions, the Boers digging trenches, the British rounding up sheep and collecting any other supplies that the barren country afforded. Just as night was closing in some Mounted Infantry appeared for a moment beyond Paardekop, and were seen to fall back under a heavy fire, and disappear in the gathering darkness. No definite information was forthcoming, and French's tired troops had to hold on unsupported. Of the eleven squadrons he had brought with him three remained on Roberts's Hill, three on Artillery Hill, and one

[1] Mr. Goldmann gives the strength of the different regiments as follows:—

	Officers.	Men.
Household Cavalry	27	371
10th Hussars	23	321
12th Lancers	19	258
6th Dragoon Guards (Carabineers)	200	
		1,219 all ranks.

Royal Horse Artillery Brigade Division, Colonel Davidson, 12 guns.

[2] Probably Paardekop itself.

[3] Called Roberts' Hill.

[4] Probably the same gun that fired on the Mounted Infantry.

covered the left flank towards Koedoesrand.[1] The rest bivouacked with French's headquarters at Kameelfontein. G Battery still remained on Artillery Hill and fired a salvo at nightfall to guide Kitchener. P Battery stayed on the right flank. The night must have been one of intense anxiety for French. He held a front fully six miles long; and his advanced post was within 2,000 yards of an enemy supposed to be ten times and actually nearly four times as numerous. Had the Boers possessed sufficient enterprise and resolution, Artillery Hill might easily have been attacked and rushed. But French reckoned as ever with the peculiar character of his enemy, and played throughout a remarkably bold and successful game of bluff. Even the march to the Modder and the interception of Cronje do not surpass in resolution and audacity the long and anxious vigil that followed.

The cavalry had little comfort or rest that night. Men and animals were worn out with toil and watching. There was practically no food for the horses, and though a few sheep were served out, many of the men had to be content with the remains of what they had brought from Klip Drift two days before.[2] A strict watch had to be kept, and on Artillery Hill no fires were permitted, the only guide to the positions of the British troops being the red flash of the battery guns, as an occasional shot was fired as a warning to friends and enemies.

Nothing that the Cavalry could have done would have prevented Cronje's escape, had he been minded to sacrifice his baggage and make off on horseback.[3] The 6th Division and the Mounted Infantry were equally unable to prevent such an attempt. French's artillery fire had been heard, but it was still quite uncertain where Cronje had encamped. With the exception of the 6th Mounted Infantry and the Australians,

[1] During the night the advanced squadrons went back in turn to water at Kameelfontein, a distance of 3 to 5 miles.

[2] In some cases the emergency ration was eaten.

[3] This remark applies only to the bulk of Conje's men. The long halt and bad grazing at Magersfontein had proved most fatal to his horses. The mobility on which the Boers relied both for their forage and for fighting purposes had largely deserted them, and when they retreated probably one man in every five was dismounted.

none of the mounted troops had been available in the morning; the 4th Mounted Infantry and Kitchener's Horse only got in touch with the enemy on the left bank late in the afternoon;[1] the 2nd Mounted Infantry, which had moved up the right bank to support Antill, was unable to find either him or a crossing, and after wandering about for some hours were obliged to rejoin the force by Brandvallei, a detour which prevented them from reaching their bivouac near Paardeberg Drift until dawn on the morning of the 18th. The Boers were easily able to check the small number of mounted men brought against them, and Kelly-Kenny's Infantry Division was far behind. It was not united on the left bank at Brandvallei Drift until 10 a.m.; and here the men, who had been without food on the preceding day, had a meal, and rested till half-past five. Soon after dark it reached the Petrusberg road, about two miles south of Paardeberg Drift, when a message arrived from Lord Kitchener, who was in front with the 4th Mounted Infantry, suggesting that it should continue to move parallel to the river.[2] The different battalions came into camp between 9 p.m. and 1 a.m., bivouacking about a mile beyond the road behind the Mounted Infantry, who held an outpost line covering the front of the Division to the east and north. About midnight the Highland Brigade marched in from Klip Kraal with the 7th and 8th Mounted Infantry, and bivouacked just south of Paardeberg Drift; Colvile moving with the 19th Brigade, the 5th Mounted Infantry, and the artillery was delayed by a mass of transport and did not get up until 4.15 a.m. The 9th Division had made two consecutive night marches, covering over thirty miles in thirty hours.

At this point, when events are fast hurrying towards their climax, we may conveniently cast a backward glance upon the plan of campaign, and, so far as the available information allows, review its development up to the moment of final collision.

[1] The 6th Mounted Infantry, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, Kitchener's Horse, and the 4th Mounted Infantry crossed one mile below Paardeberg Drift.

[2] This change of direction, which was necessary owing to the uncertainty prevailing as to the enemy's position, entailed great scarcity of water. The last time that most of the battalions had a chance of filling their water-bottles before they went into action on the 18th was at Brandvallei, and these had been emptied during the extremely hot and dusty march of the afternoon.

We have already referred to the fact that in making the relief of Kimberley his first object, Lord Roberts violated the rules of "absolute war." As is pointed out in the history of the German General Staff, the proceeding most in agreement with the spirit and methods of modern warfare would have been a rapid convergent advance upon Cronje's flank and rear at Magersfontein; culminating, we may suppose, in a simultaneous infantry attack from Modder Camp, Brown's Drift, and Klip Drift and a wide turning movement of the Cavalry beyond Spytfontein. Lord Roberts never seems to have even contemplated such a plan. The single column formation in which the army advanced from Ramdam, the non-employment of the shorter routes from Honeynest Kloof to Brown's Drift and Jacobsdal, and the instructions given to Lord Methuen forbidding an attack on the Magersfontein position, are decisive against any such conclusion. And it may be remarked in passing that even had the opposite been the case, the execution of an advance on a broader front for the purposes of a general attack would have been seriously deranged, and what was worse, delayed, by the sudden appearance of De Wet's force at Waterval: indeed, it is quite uncertain whether, in view of this interruption and the minor difficulties connected with the crossing of the Riet, the concentration on the Modder could have taken place in time to strike Cronje before he retired. At any rate criticism of Lord Roberts's march-disposition as a preliminary to immediate concentration for battle is beside the point, for so far as we can discover it had no such object.[1]

The Field-Marshal did not intend to attack Cronje in the Magersfontein position. His plan rendered, and was intended to render, such a consummation impossible. His first object was to assure himself of the immediate safety of Kimberley. He believed it to be in peril; and the danger, supposing, as he supposed, that it existed, was one that was bound to become more pressing with every moment that its removal was delayed. Hence the precipitate march of French. But in this movement lay also the key to the second part of his plan, which aimed

[1] The German Staff History makes the further criticism that the divisions were too much separated in the order of march, and were liable to be attacked and overwhelmed singly. The authors appears to forget that the Boers were incapable of carrying out so bold an operation.

at the defeat or annihilation of Cronje's force. The first step in its attainment was the shifting of the Boer army out of the Magersfontein entrenchments; the second was an attack upon it in a position unprovided with artificial defences and less naturally strong. Whether in so judging the British General did not exaggerate the advantages that would result from the avoidance of Magersfontein may be doubted for, as Klip Kraal, Paardeberg, and Driefontein showed, there are many positions which, under modern conditions, are easily defensible without artificial preparation; and, as was proved at Poplar Grove, elaborate entrenchments are no defence against outflanking attack. The method of manœuvring an enemy out of a position before fighting him belongs rather to eighteenth than to nineteenth-century strategy, and the experiences of the South African war do not prove the necessity of its adoption. Moreover to allow the enemy to move before attacking him was to increase, *pro tanto*, his chances of escape, and, if a lengthened pursuit became necessary, our own difficulties of supply. However, Lord Roberts judged differently; and as the means of thus shifting the enemy he seems to have counted on the march of the Cavalry on Kimberley. This is worth noting, if only because French's advance is generally regarded as an eccentric movement which, while placing all the most serviceable of the mounted troops out of touch with the remainder of the army, and incidentally impairing their mobility, had no effect upon the main operation. Unless we have misinterpreted Lord Roberts's views and the facts of the campaign this last contention is untenable.

Although, had there been no Kimberley to relieve—had Cronje, for instance, been holding the Modder against columns marching to the relief of Mafeking—it is extremely improbable that the Cavalry would have been sent unsupported into his rear; although, in sending French to Kimberley, Lord Roberts had primarily in view the relief of the town; it nevertheless appears certain that he hoped and expected that the movement would have the further effect of causing Cronje to retire. The event proved the correctness of his judgment. When the Cavalry got round, as Cronje wrote to Steyn, he could not remain at Magersfontein. French's manœuvre may have had yet another result. If it compelled Cronje to abandon Magersfontein it is possible that

it influenced the direction of his retreat. The best line of retreat open to him when the British troops seized the Modder drifts was round the western side of Kimberley to the Vaal passages and Boshof. It was the line[1] which would have been the safest for the Boers and the most inconvenient for us. For by retreating on Boshof, Cronje would have obliged the British army either to follow him into the broken and barren country north of the Modder or to leave him on the flank of the route to Bloemfontein. The possibility of a retreat to the northward was, according to Sternberg, actually discussed in the Boer headquarters on the afternoon of February 15th; may it not then reasonably be assumed that the presence of the Cavalry at Kimberley had a share in driving Cronje across Kelly-Kenny's front?

Thus in French's march we see the connecting link between the two parts of Roberts's plan. This method of blocking the northern line of retreat had other substantial advantages. The Cavalry might of course have moved on Spytfontein instead of Kimberley; that is, in the immediate rear of the main body of the enemy. But they would have been involved in hilly and practically waterless country, twelve miles from anywhere, and, moreover, would have been exposed to the risk of an attack from Kimberley as well as from Cronje's men.[2] Had this occurred they would probably have been driven back with loss, or at best have failed to attain their object. On the other hand, by avoiding Cronje as much as possible and falling suddenly on the investing force at Kimberley, they would strike the extreme wing of the enemy, which was known to be weak, and, after driving it northward, would be free to manœuvre against Cronje himself with the garrison and the resources of the town at their back.

Such appear to have been Lord Roberts's calculations. To the reasons which induced him to send the Cavalry to Kimberley in the first instance we have already referred; of the effect of the policy of manœuvre as contrasted with that of direct attack we shall say something later on.

[1] The intention to send the Mounted Infantry to Kimberley on the morning of February 16th is only intelligible on the assumption that Cronje was retreating northward.

[2] On the morning of February 15th it was not known that the Boers were already evacuating their positions south of Kimberley.

While it must be conceded that the plan lacked the directness and simplicity which are two of the principal characteristics of modern strategy, the view that Cronje's capture was a mere stroke of luck seems to us unintelligible. No doubt in the sense that at the commencement of the operations so great a result was unhoped for, such a conclusion has a degree of truth. No doubt the errors of Cronje alone made his destruction possible. It was always open to him to retreat in time. So, for the matter of that, could Mack have retreated from Ulm, or MacMahon from Sedan. But in the sense that Lord Roberts owed nothing to his own dispositions, the criticism can only be sustained by leaving out of account the effect of the outflanking march to the Modder. From this movement alone did it result that on the evening of February 15th Cronje found his enemy in a position to close his two principal lines of retreat.

But it is not until his retreat from Magersfontein becomes known that the full vigour and concentrative power of the British leadership flashes suddenly into view. From this moment there is no longer any doubt as to the objective at which the blow is aimed. No effort is spared to overtake the flying enemy ; the pursuit is pressed regardless of the exhaustion of men and horses and the shortage of supplies. From the one side Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny, from the other French close in on their cumbrous march. Behind them the Commander-in-Chief, momentarily incapacitated by illness from accompanying the troops, urges his subordinates forward. "I hope," he writes to General Kelly-Kenny on February 17th, "you are pushing on with all possible speed to overtake Cronje's laager. It is of the utmost importance that it should not get away. . . . If we can deal Cronje a heavy blow it is likely that there will be no further fighting in the Free State."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF PAARDEBERG

CRONJE STILL IN POSITION AT DAWN ON THE 18TH—OPERATIONS OF THE CAVALRY—ADVANCE OF 6TH DIVISION—KITCHENER'S HORSE LOCATE CRONJE'S LAAGER AND BECOME ENGAGED—FURTHER MOVEMENT OF 6TH MOUNTED INFANTRY TO THE UPPER DRIFTS—KITCHENER'S KOP OCCUPIED—DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD OF BATTLE—THE QUESTION OF THE COMMAND AT PAARDEBERG—LORD KITCHENER'S REASONS FOR ATTACKING—HOW FAR JUSTIFIED—CONCEPTION AND EXECUTION—ADVANCE OF THE 6TH DIVISION—WELSH REGIMENT ENGAGED—BOER ATTACK ON THE UPPER DRIFTS—RESULTS OF THIS—ATTACK OF THE 13TH BRIGADE AND THE 1ST YORKSHIRE REGIMENT ON THE RIVER-BED—CHANGE OF DIRECTION—INADEQUATE ARTILLERY PREPARATION—END OF THE ATTACK OF THE 6TH DIVISION—ATTACK OF HIGHLAND BRIGADE—MOVEMENT OF 7TH MOUNTED INFANTRY AND 19TH BRIGADE ON THE RIGHT BANK—ADVANCE OF CANADIANS AND SHROPSHIRES—THE HIGHLAND COMPANIES ON THE RIGHT BANK—POSITION AT MIDDAY—LORD KITCHENER DETERMINES ON A FRESH ATTACK—ATTACK OF ESSEX REGIMENT ALONG LEFT BANK—MOVEMENTS OF THE MOUNTED INFANTRY—FRESH ORDERS ISSUED—KITCHENER'S KOP RE-TAKEN BY DE WET—RESULTS OF THIS COMPLICATION—FINAL ATTACKS ON CRONJE'S LEFT—HANNAY'S DEATH—LAST ATTACK OF WELSH REGIMENT—ATTACK ON CRONJE'S RIGHT BY DUKE OF CORNWALL'S LIGHT INFANTRY AND CANADIANS—DEATH OF ALDWORTH—GENERAL RETIREMENT ORDERED—POSITIONS AT NIGHTFALL—LORD KITCHENER STILL IN FAVOUR OF A NIGHT ATTACK—THE BRITISH GENERALSHIP—BEHAVIOUR OF THE TROOPS

LONG before daybreak on the 18th French rode out to visit his advanced position at Artillery Hill, and thence westward to Roberts's Hill, in hopes of seeing or hearing something of the 6th Division. Nothing was known either of our own troops or of the enemy, and the river-bed was still enveloped in darkness. It was feared that Cronje had retreated, for the drifts were believed to be shallow, and no sound came from the direction in which his laager had lain on the preceding evening. Slowly and indistinctly, as the dawn brightened, the dim mass of waggons loomed up through the river mists, and the capture of the enemy's baggage was assured.[1] But it

[1] The enemy's waggon train was scattered for a considerable distance along the bank, so that to collect and remove it would in any case have been a matter of extreme difficulty. During the night and the early part of the morning it seems to have been drawn closer together so as to form two large contiguous masses.

LORD KITCHENER.

was still uncertain whether his fighting men had not made off; and the doubt was not dispelled until a few Boers straggled out of the laager and came up to the cavalry outposts to surrender. These men asserted that the Boer General, with his whole force, were still in the river-bed; and their statements were confirmed by the sight of men entrenching.

All now depended upon Kelly-Kenny's force, and at dawn, although nothing could be seen of them, his advanced companies of Mounted Infantry were crossing the river at Paardeberg Drift, and had already sighted the laager at Wolvekraal. Soon after 6 a.m. the dust of the main body became visible over the rolling veldt to the south, and about 7 a.m. helio communication was opened between French and Kitchener. Acting apparently upon the instances of the Generals on the left bank, French sent Broadwood's main body eastwards so as to frustrate any attempt of the enemy to break out in that direction; and by 10 a.m. a squadron of the 12th Lancers had established itself on the centre of the ridge between Koedoesrand Drift and Kameelfontein. The ford itself the enemy held throughout the day; but by 8.30 Banks's Drift, a mile to the south-west of it, was in our hands, a party of Lancers there meeting the 6th Mounted Infantry, who had moved along the opposite bank. For the remainder of the day the Cavalry, whose horses, from want of food, were now almost incapable of exertion, maintained their position, resting their left on the stream at Banks's Drift, and touching with their right the Mounted Infantry near Paardekop. With the exception of the occasional fire of their artillery, they took no active part in the operations.[1]

While the anxious horsemen were straining their eyes to penetrate the darkness of the early morning Kelly-Kenny's troops were already in movement. Between 3 and 4 a.m. the infantry of the 6th Division left their bivouac and began to move towards Paardeberg Drift. But they had not proceeded far when heavy rifle fire was heard in front; and Kitchener, who had bivouacked on the right front with the 4th Mounted Infantry, rode back and directed the Division upon Wolvekraal Drift, where Cronje had already been located. The head

[1] The German Staff History states that French's inactivity was due to the pressure brought to bear on his left by the Boers at Koedoesrand.

of the column wheeled to the north-east, and about six o'clock was approaching the low spur (D) that overlooks the drift from a mile and a half to the southward.

Covering the advance of the Division to the north and east, Kitchener's Horse, with the 6th Mounted Infantry in support and the 4th on its right, had pushed forward before dawn towards the river, and had been fired on from the southern face of the Boer position. Some of the regiment were riding within a few hundred yards' range when the enemy opened and were obliged to reply to the fire from where they were; the rest scattered to the rear of the 6th Mounted Infantry, who, leaving the irregulars to hold the Boers in front, took up the duties of the advanced guard, and pushed on past the laager so as to cut off Cronje from the east. Covering a wide front, and meeting with little resistance, De Lisle reached and occupied Vanderberg's and Banks's Drift by half-past eight, occupying the latter after driving away a small party of the enemy[1] who had advanced down the river from Koedoesrand to oppose him. At Banks's Drift, as we have recounted, he came in touch with a patrol of the 12th Lancers.

The junction of De Lisle and the Cavalry closed Cronje's last line of retreat. The 6th Mounted Infantry Regiment established itself at Banks's Drift, the 5th, accompanied by Colonel Hannay, occupied Vanderberg's; the 4th, with a squadron of Kitchener's Horse, seized without difficulty the high hill three miles to the south-west, which was afterwards known as Kitchener's Kop. This most important position was within long rifle range of the ridge (D) south of the laager, commanded all the ground within a radius of three thousand yards to the west, south, and north, and whatever form the subsequent operations against Cronje might happen to take, was essential to the security of the army. Soon after 8 a.m., probably owing to the threatening appearance of the enemy on the hills to the north-east, the troops on the Kop were reinforced by three companies of the Essex Regiment.[2]

While these movements of the Mounted Infantry were in progress

[1] Captain Malcolm, Colonel Hannay's aide-de-camp, was badly wounded here.

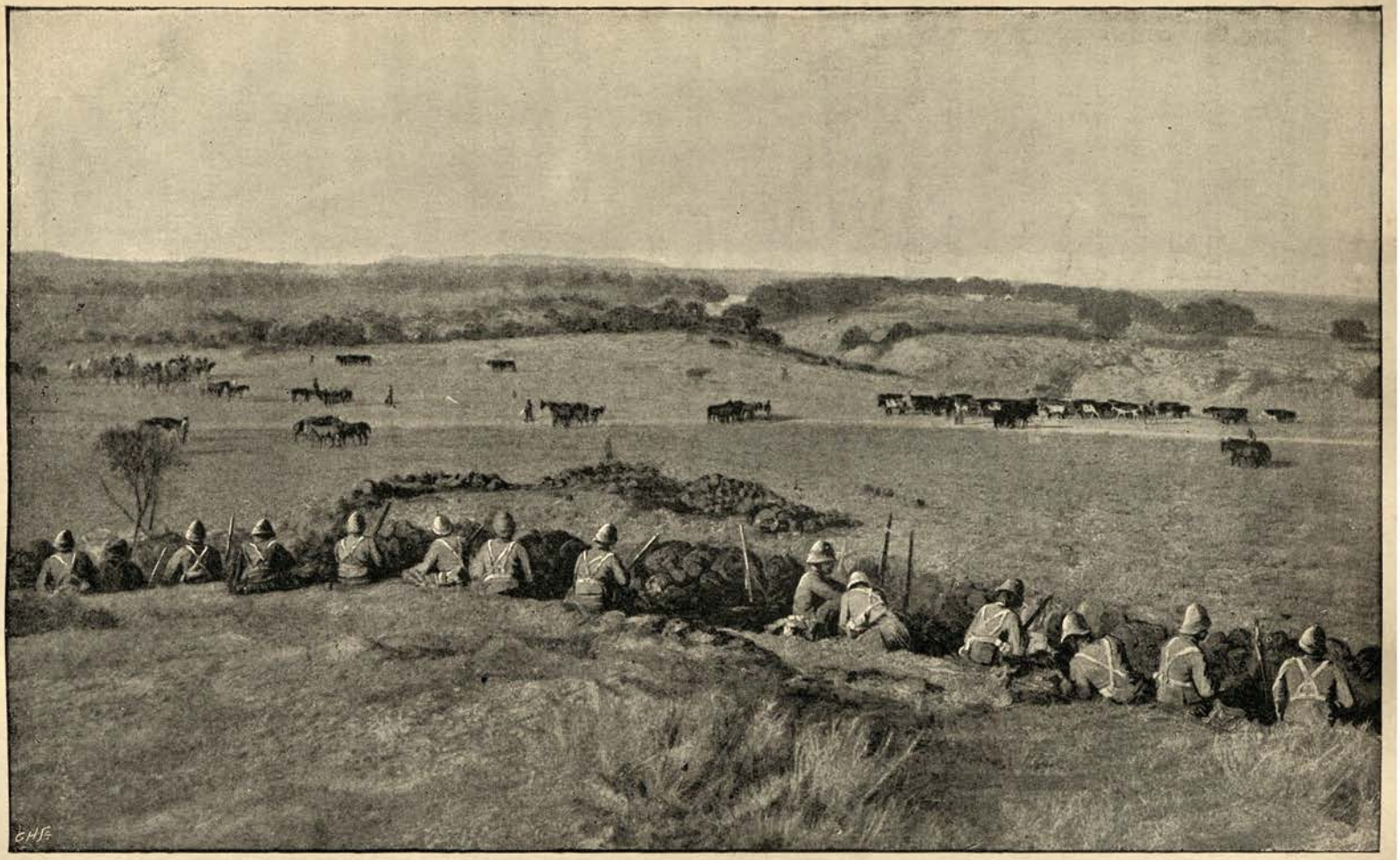
[2] Our account differs from that of the German Staff History, which says that these companies belonged to the Gloucestershire Regiment.

Lord Kitchener and General Kelly-Kenny were riding on in front of the 6th Division, and about 6 a.m. reached the ridge south of the laager. From this point the lines of Boer waggons on the northern bank and the windings of the river itself were easily visible. Heliographic communication was soon established with French; and while the Infantry were advancing the British leaders had time to decide on their course of action.

From their central position they could scan the whole field of the approaching engagement. From Vanderberg Drift, some two-and-a-half miles in a straight line from Wolvekraal, the river runs almost due west, and then trending for a while to the southward, turns north-west towards Cronje's position through banks thickly covered with scrub and trees and intersected with deep dongas. The height of the banks about the water is about thirty feet; the stream itself is forty yards broad. At the drifts in ordinary weather its depth is three feet; between them, even in the dry season, it is only passable by swimming. On the morning of the 18th a heavy spate had come down, the current ran at a great rate, and even at the fords the crossing was one of great difficulty and danger.[1] Below the Wolvekraal Drift the river sweeps boldly to the south-west and west for two miles; then, at the point where a huge donga runs into the main bed, bends sharply to the south, and after following this direction for a mile, curves broadly westwards to Paardeberg Drift. From Vanderberg to Paardeberg the distance, measured in a straight line, is fully six miles.

It was with this extensive front, a line so long and so full of obstacles as to render accurate co-operation between the flanks and centre of an attacking force a matter of extreme difficulty, that the British Generals had now to reckon. Of Cronje's dispositions little or nothing was to be seen. It must by this time have been known that Martyr's Mounted Infantry were sharply engaged in the curve east of Paardeberg Drift, and it was practically certain that no lodgment on either bank in the space between that point and the waggons, which

[1] On this section of the river were two ponts or ferries. The one about a mile above the eastern end of Cronje's position was not used on the 18th, as it was commanded by rifle fire; the other, nearly two miles below Wolvekraal, was surrounded by his riflemen.

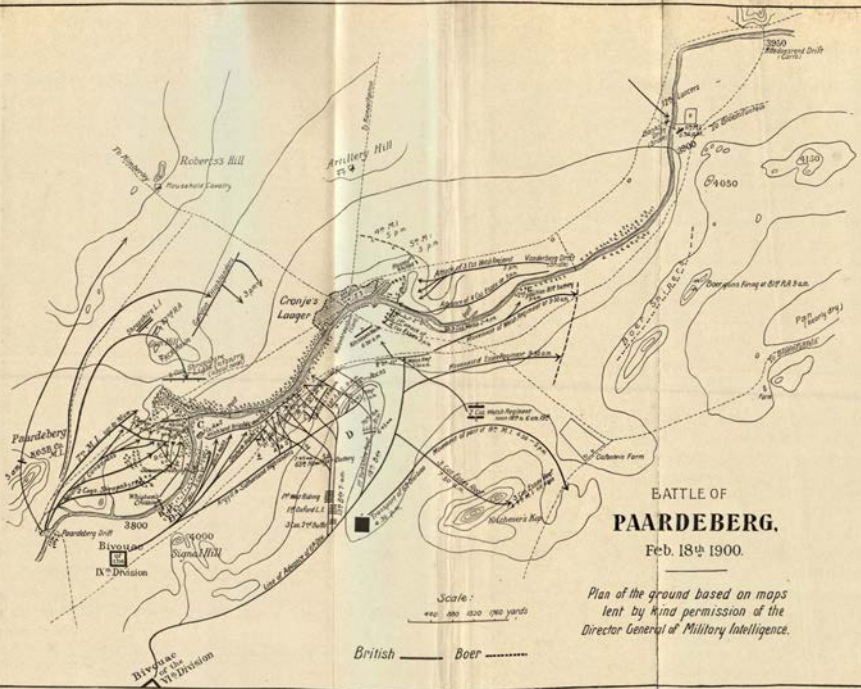


BOER POSITION AT PAARDEBERG.
(During the investment.)

stood like a straggling line of small white houses on either side of Wolvekraal Drift, could be effected without hard fighting. But how far above the drift the Boer position extended must at that moment have been quite uncertain, for Kitchener's Horse, then engaged close to the south of the laager, could make no way; and the 6th Mounted Infantry Regiment had barely begun its movement towards the higher drifts. A few Boers could be seen entrenching on the left bank near the laager; their main body was invisible in the river-bed and the thick belt of vegetation along its edges.

The ground between the ridge and the river was as unfavourable to an assailant as can well be conceived. In long gentle slopes, dotted here and there with ant-hills, the veldt sank down to a level with the banks, leaving between the foot of the decline and the Wolvekraal Drift an absolutely bare flat some 1,200 yards broad, across which ran the road track to Koedoesrand and Osfontein. To the left front, where the Wolvekraal bend swept round to the southward, the chances were slightly better. Here the ground was rather higher, and was intersected with an outcrop of rock (A on map) which ran in a jagged line at distances varying from six hundred to four hundred yards from the fringe of trees on the bank itself. The distance, moreover, from the crest of the ridge to the Modder was in this direction about half a mile shorter than to the laager. East and north-east of Lord Kitchener's standpoint the ground was flat and bare; westwards, between the rocky outcrop and the kopje afterwards known as Signal Hill, beneath which Martyr was fighting, it was absolutely level and devoid of cover.

General Kelly-Kenny's view of the ground convinced him that a frontal attack would certainly be costly, and offered very small chance of success; and he seems to have intended first of all so to occupy the terrain as to render Cronje's escape impossible, and then to push strong attacks east and west along the river-bed, carefully avoiding the open plain on the north and south. But this plan, which never seems to have taken the form of an order, was almost immediately overruled by Lord Kitchener; and by eight o'clock the leading battalions were engaged in a desperate assault against the southern face of Cronje's position.



BATTLE OF

PAARDEBERG.

Feb. 18th 1900.

Plan of the ground based on maps lent by kind permission of the Director General of Military Intelligence.

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We have not yet referred to the question raised by Lord Kitchener's presence with the force under General Kelly-Kenny. It had been primarily intended that he should act as the representative of the Commander-in-Chief, who at the time was uncertain as to the course Cronje would adopt, and was himself momentarily incapacitated by illness. "I wanted some person," said Lord Roberts before the Royal Commission,[1] "who would be a means of communication between me, General Kelly-Kenny, and General French, and I sent Lord Kitchener, telling him to join General Kelly-Kenny, and keep me informed of any news he might hear from General French, or any movements General Kelly-Kenny might decide to make. . . . I never intended Lord Kitchener to take command." The practice of sending officers from headquarters to communicate to the executive generals the plans and views of the Commander-in-Chief has of course several precedents in the history of the Franco-German war; but during that campaign these messengers acted in a purely advisory capacity, and never attempted to influence directly the measures of the army commanders. Moreover, they were never or rarely above the rank of colonel; and so soon as they had laid the situation before the officer to whom they were sent they usually returned to headquarters. Their missions therefore cannot be regarded as similar to that of Lord Kitchener; who, by reason of his strong personality and high position could hardly avoid influencing the course of events, and who, moreover, had orders to remain with the 6th Division until the Commander-in-Chief himself overtook it.[2] We have already seen that at Klip Kraal the Chief of the Staff issued orders to the Mounted Infantry, and personally supervised their operations during the pursuit of the following day; although, as General Kelly-Kenny stated, he admitted without reserve that the general direction and responsibility remained with the commander of the 6th Division. But on the 17th their relations were considerably modified by a message from Lord Roberts to Kelly-Kenny. "Please consider," he wrote, "that Lord Kitchener is with you for the purpose of communicating to you my orders so that there may be no delay such as reference to and fro may entail." We have Lord Roberts's own word for affirming that he in no

[1] Royal Commission, Questions 13130–1. [2] Royal Commission, Question 10843.

way wished to supersede General Kelly-Kenny; on the contrary, it is evident that he contemplated increasing his freedom of action by placing at his side one who was thoroughly conversant with his views and intentions, and could without delay confer upon any measures that Kelly-Kenny considered advisable a sanction as authoritative as his own. But in the pressure of the moment the Field-Marshal does not seem to have realised that the effects of the message would very largely depend on its interpretation. While it gave to Lord Kitchener the right to approve and confirm, it could also be construed as giving him the right to initiate. "Anything like 'orders,'" as General Kelly-Kenny pointed out,[1] "was quite incompatible with my being in command"; and from the moment of the receipt of the message he regarded himself as superseded. He conducted himself accordingly. As he wrote in his report to Lord Roberts on the battle of Paardeberg: "In accordance with instructions conveyed to me in your note of the 17th, I recognised his (Lord Kitchener's) suggestions as conveying to me your lordship's orders, and acted thereon." That Lord Kitchener in any sense knowingly presumed on his position we do not for a moment suggest. But it is clear that during the action he occupied the place of commander, although technically he was not in command. His own energy, his strong conviction of the need of vigorous measures, and General Kelly-Kenny's attitude of loyal submission to what he believed were Lord Roberts's wishes, inevitably forced the Chief of the Staff into a position which he had not at the first been intended to occupy.

With him, then, the responsibility for the general conception and execution of the assault must rest; and it is from these two standpoints that his management may be criticised. The view that the attack was faulty in method can only be discussed when the story of the battle is told; the validity of the opinion that no attack should have been made at all must be examined at once, in the light of Lord Kitchener's position and knowledge of the facts on the morning of the 18th.

For the theory that he attacked in order to prevent the enemy from escaping there appears little foundation. It is just conceivable

[1] Royal Commission, Question 16921.

that when he rode on to the ridge overlooking the laager some fears on this score may have arisen in his mind. De Lisle's eastward movement was only just commencing, it was uncertain how strongly the upper drifts were held, and if the Mounted Infantry were checked Cronje's horsemen might use the respite to make a dash for freedom, which at the moment would probably have succeeded.[1] The only chance of frustrating such an attempt was to attack their main position immediately with any troops within reach, Had he adopted the slower method of forming a ring of investment, and had the enemy dashed away as soon as the movement of the Mounted Infantry began to develop, the greater part would certainly have evaded capture, and Lord Kitchener would have lost an opportunity too good to be hoped for and most unlikely to occur again. Anticipations of such a contingency would have been perfectly intelligible. But we are inclined to think that Lord Kitchener no more suspected Cronje of harbouring such a design, than Cronje himself at that time contemplated the possibility of having to surrender. The motives to attack must be sought elsewhere. The Chief of the Staff was not likely to be content with holding his opponent fast. He envisaged the situation as a soldier, who had for two days been engaged in a hot pursuit, whose sole object had been to bring the enemy to bay, and whose natural instinct impelled him to close with that enemy at the earliest opportunity. Greatly in need of food and transport, he reckoned with satisfaction on appropriating the supplies and waggons of Cronje's laager to the wants of his half-starved men. Above all he realised the overwhelming moral effect that would result from the successful attack and sudden capture of the whole of Cronje's force and the enormous importance, not only from the point of view of supply, but also from that of military and political expediency, of a rapid and unchecked march to Bloemfontein. If the full fruits of the initiative were to be reaped Cronje must be crushed at once; and an immediate attack would possess the incidental advantages of preventing the enemy from further entrenching their position and of

[1] Compare De Wet's escape on the 21st from Kitchener's Kop. Several of the Boer commandants afterwards admitted the feasibility of escape at this moment.

utilising to the utmost the temporary demoralisation and dissensions which the events of the preceding days had produced in their ranks. It was not unreasonable to expect that their resistance would be proportionately weakened; an impression which was strengthened by the surrender of individual Boers and their versions of the state of affairs in Cronje's laager. All these factors made for haste, and their urgency was heightened by the near approach of the Boer reinforcements, on which Cronje confidently counted to release him from his precarious situation. What information of the position and numbers of these bodies Lord Kitchener may have possessed at the moment we do not know; but before the army left Modder River their possible strength had been calculated at several thousand men, and he probably held them, quite rightly, at a liberal estimate. It is true that at Paardeberg, even in the very crisis of the campaign, the Boers showed their customary lack of vigour; and it is possible that Lord Kitchener, who had up till that time seen little of his enemy, was inclined to rate his enterprise more highly than a man of General French's experience would have done. It is also true that if the 7th Division and the remainder of the Cavalry arrived in time they could be relied on largely to neutralise the efforts of the relieving force. But on the 18th the former were still two marches distant at Jacobsdal, and the latter, though Gordon's Brigade was hourly expected, were weakened by their recent exertions. Short of stating positively, which is indeed impossible without further knowledge of the data upon which Lord Kitchener's decision was based, that one of the main reasons for his precipitation of the action was the supposed necessity of anticipating the enemy's relieving force, we think we may reasonably conclude that this factor told strongly in favour of immediate action; especially when it is remembered that his available troops only numbered 13,000 sabres and bayonets and 36 guns,[1] a very small force with which to hold a ring of investment twenty miles in extent against possible attack from within and without.

Enough, at any rate, has been said to show that there were solid considerations, reasons of supply and reasons of immediate and there-

[1] In view of the grossly exaggerated estimates of the British force which appeared

fore future military expediency, which made time a matter of more than ordinary importance. One question—could Cronje be overwhelmed by a direct attack?—still remained to be answered; and Lord Kitchener, with characteristic decision, and with complete confidence in the result, hastened to put it to the proof without a moment's delay.[1]

About 6.30 a.m. the Infantry of the 6th Division were within 3,000 yards of the river-bank, though still hidden from the laager by the low ridge in front. The leading brigade, under Colonel Stephenson, was now moving along its eastern slope, covered by widely-extended companies of the Welsh Regiment, which formed the advanced guard of the Division. The 1st Essex Regiment followed, and the 1st Yorkshires, moving in half-battalion columns on either flank of Kelly-Kenny's Brigade Division,[2] brought up the rear. On the left of Stephenson, but a little to the rear, marched Knox's Brigade, which had been wheeled to the left or northward, and was advancing straight upon Wolvekraal Drift. The 1st West Riding Regiment led, followed by the Oxfordshire Light Infantry and three companies of the Buffs. The rest of the last-named battalion, the whole of the Gloucester Regiment, and the 8th Mounted Infantry remained behind to guard the baggage, which had been left at the bivouac some two miles to the south-west.

in various contemporary accounts it is worth while to give its composition and numbers :—

	Men.	Guns.
2nd Cavalry Brigade and two squadrons of Carabineers ...	1,200 ...	12
6th Division (less 2nd Royal Warwickshire Regiment and 150 killed and wounded and sick)	5,428 ...	12
9th Division (less 1st Highland Light Infantry and 50 sick)	5,668 ...	12
2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th Mounted Infantry Regiments, New South Wales Mounted Infantry, and Kitchener's Horse	2,000* ...	—
	14,296 ...	36

[1] So confident was he that at the moment when the attack was about to commence he pulled out his watch and said: "Gentlemen, it is now half-past six; at ten o'clock we shall be in possession of the enemy's laager, and at half-past ten General French, with the cavalry, will start for Bloemfontein" (German Staff History, p. 65). Presumably he was at this moment unaware of the strength of French's force and the condition of his horses.

[2] 76th and 81st Field Batteries.

* A liberal estimate.

Whatever might be the ultimate use to which the 18th Brigade was to be put, it was obviously desirable to extricate that part of Kitchener's Horse which was still in action near the Boer laager, and soon after 7 a.m. the Welsh Regiment, whose leading companies had by this time rounded the spur of the ridge, was directed to cover the withdrawal of the irregulars. Four companies were at once pushed forward to the road which ran across the river bend, and being somewhat worn down by traffic offered a slight protection. But the retirement of the Horse, many of whom were within easy range of the river bank, was no easy matter, and although the two left companies of the Welsh Regiment succeeded in advancing to within 800 yards of the enemy's position, their object was only partially achieved. Some of the mounted riflemen managed to get away, but a good number remained where they were, nailed to the ground by the heavy fire, and unable to withdraw from their unpleasant position between friend and foe until night put an end to the action. The two Welsh companies themselves came under a sharp fire of shrapnel and Mauser, and when three hours later the foremost fell back they suffered not a few casualties, including Major Harkness and Lieutenant Veal, both wounded. Separated from their battalion by their advance, they received no further orders, and about midday retired to a position half-way between Kitchener's Kop and the river, where they remained for eighteen hours in complete isolation.

In the meantime, probably about 9 a.m., the relieving forces of Boers were beginning to make their presence felt on the hills to the north and north-east of Vanderberg's Drift, and the Welsh Regiment, together with some companies of the Essex, received orders to support the Mounted Infantry who were holding the crossing. Under a heavy flanking fire the first-named battalion left its advanced position on the road and defiled to the right under cover of some lateral dongas, furnishing on its way an escort to the 81st Battery, which had been ordered eastward about an hour before to check any attempt of the enemy to break out by the northern bank. Coming into action against the laager from a position about 1,000 yards west of Vanderberg's Drift, the battery had been surprised

by receiving a shell from the rear, and on wheeling round found itself opposed by two Creusot guns on the hills to the east. A few well-directed shells forced the Boer artillery to shift to another position, but their snipers were not so easily dislodged; and when, at about 10 a.m., three companies of the Welsh and part of the Essex Regiments took ground to the south of the drift they became engaged in a long-range duel with the enemy's riflemen that lasted throughout the morning. Resting their right on the troops on Kitchener's Kop, and their left on the river, they had no difficulty in holding their own and covering the right and right rear of the main British force; but it is noteworthy that the threat of attack from this direction held fast a fourth of the Field Artillery and a sixth of the Infantry and, by preventing these troops until late in the afternoon from taking a share in the action that was now raging along the river front, reduced the infantry of the 6th Division immediately available for the main assault to a strength of three-and-a-half battalions, and deprived them of the assistance that an attack from the east might, even indirectly, have given. As the event proved, an unnecessarily large force was neutralised by the guns and snipers east of Osfontein; but considering General Stephenson's situation between them and Cronje's laager, it is not surprising that he should have devoted his attention to the new enemy until he was able to form some idea of his numbers and intentions. How difficult Kitchener's position would have been if a strong relieving column of Boers had attacked him with vigour, and how inadequate in such an eventuality his force would have proved is shown by the effect that was produced by the weak commandos which appeared during the day.

While the Welsh were moving forward to extricate Kitchener's Horse the 1st Yorkshires with the divisional batteries reached the top of the ridge (D). The guns at once opened fire at 2,500 yards upon the laager, destroying many horses and cattle, and almost silencing the enemy's gun fire, which never became a serious factor in the action. Leaving the batteries to the care of two companies of Gloucesters which soon afterwards came up, the Yorkshire Regiment wheeled half-left and deployed into line facing the section of the

Modder River to the south-west of the laager. Here it remained for some time awaiting orders and replying to a sharp long-range fire from the river-bed; its right on the north and north-eastern point of the spur (D), its left and centre along the crest line fronting north-west.

About the same time the West Ridings also reached the top of the ridge, on the left rear of the Yorkshires, and were followed a few minutes later by the Oxfordshire Light Infantry.[1] These battalions had not moved far along the plateau when both received orders to attack, and at once extended, the West Ridings placing two, the Oxfordshire three companies in the firing line. The advance was scarcely resumed when they were ordered to change direction half-left, the West Ridings to attack, the Oxfordshire to support. The latter fell to the right rear of the former, and the Yorkshires soon afterwards being directed to clear the Boer trenches on the south bank, the three battalions went forward without delay, the general disposition resembling a rough échelon left in front.

The change of direction is important, for it threw the attack not against the laager, but the river-bed south-west of it, and avoiding the open plain due south of Wolvekraal Drift, brought the assaulting troops into close conjunction with Macdonald's Brigade, which, with the Howitzer Battery, had been called by Lord Kitchener to General Kelly-Kenny's support, and was now moving towards the flank of Knox's infantry. The alteration was probably dictated by the character of the ground, which in this quarter afforded to a frontal attack the best chance of success; but it was probably one of the causes of the over-

[1] The times, as in all accounts of fighting, are differently given. Lord Kitchener's verbal order to Sir Henry Colvile to support the 6th Division with the Highland Brigade and his artillery reached the latter about 7 a.m. The West Riding Regiment reached the ridge a few minutes before that hour, and almost immediately received orders to attack. The Yorkshires, who had reached the ridge earlier and were the first to come under fire, appear to have received their instructions rather later, but moved in line with the Oxfordshire Light Infantry when the latter advanced in support of the West Ridings. Probably Lord Kitchener's order to attack was issued about 6.45 a.m. It may be noted here that our account differs throughout from that of the German Staff History, which places the Oxfordshire Light Infantry on the *left* of the 13th Brigade. All our information goes to prove that they were between the 1st Yorkshires and the West Ridings.

lapping of the 13th and Highland Brigades, and possessed the further disadvantages of massing the bulk of the attacking infantry against a single section of Cronje's position and, in the absence of Stephenson's troops, of leaving the eastern extremity of the Boer stronghold unmolested and unmenaced till a comparatively late hour in the day. Yet another result of the new direction given to the main body was that at nightfall a large gap was left in the line of the investment between the laager and Kitchener's Kop. But the matter had now passed beyond the sphere of argument; the die was cast, and the three leading battalions of the 6th Division, inadequately supported by the artillery,[1] were committed to a frontal attack down an almost coverless slope 1,200 yards broad against an enemy who was individually invisible and whose general position was more or less uncertain.

[1] The fire of the artillery was directed mainly against the enemy's waggons. But even if it had shelled the river-bed it is doubtful whether it could have kept down the Mauser fire. Eighteen guns, including the 65th Howitzer Battery, which came into action about a quarter to eight, supported the attack at first; three-quarters of an hour later, when the 81st Battery moved eastward, there were only twelve. The front attacked by the three battalions alone measured fully a mile in length, to say nothing of the ground occupied by the enemy on the south side of the laager, or the river section attacked by the Highland Brigade, from both of which directions fire could also be brought to bear upon the advancing infantry. To keep down the fire on so long a front, even supposing the position of the enemy's trenches to have been known, which was certainly not the case, would according to Continental standards have required the rapid fire of some thirty batteries; an estimate which, absurd as it may sound, was certainly confirmed by the experience of Pieters' Hill where, under exceptionally favourable conditions, some seventy guns were employed to quell the fire from the enemy's final position. German authorities calculate that against strong positions the necessary proportion of guns to length of front assailed is one battery (six guns) to 120 yards; in other words, that one battery can only keep down hostile fire over the same space as it occupies in its own line of battle. In South Africa, except on rare occasions, such as Pieters' Hill or Bergendal, single batteries were frequently told off to "prepare" a front, not of one or two hundred, but of two or three thousand paces. It is generally admitted that shrapnel fire cannot inflict heavy losses on men under good cover, and that even the extreme accuracy of modern guns cannot ensure the fall of high explosive shell into the infinitesimally small aperture presented by a well-made trench. It follows, then, that all that can be done is by an incessant deluge of projectiles on every part of the position to prevent the defenders from putting up their heads to fire. This necessitates an exceedingly numerous artillery, able to vomit shot as a hose spouts water. To carry the metaphor a little further, it may truly be said that the fire of our guns, well directed as they generally were, resembled the sprinkling of an intermittently-worked syringe.

The advance had hardly begun when Colonel Lloyd, of the West Riding Regiment, saw the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders approaching his left front and flank and, unwilling to cede the honour of the first line, hurried his men on. In lines of successive companies extended to ten paces interval, and with a depth of about 500 yards, the battalion went swiftly forward through a fire which had been growing steadily hotter and now became intense. Field gun, machine gun, and rifle raked the battalion from front to rear, and despite the openness of the formation men fell fast. Once in the broad zone swept by the horizontal fire of the Mauser, battalion-command became impossible; the supporting lines suffered as much as those in front, and the advance rapidly loosened into a series of company, half-company, and sectional rushes, and at last into a ragged progress of mingled groups and individuals. But the gallant leading of the officers and the dogged determination and discipline of the men weathered the storm, and in spite of constant losses the forward impetus was splendidly maintained. In jagged but continuous progress the wave of infantrymen rolled onward, and in about an hour the foremost had got within 400 yards of the river-bank. Behind them the wreckage of the attack lay dotted along the slope, interspersed with the groups and lines of the rearward companies still struggling on through the fire. The machine guns and their detachments, which had come to a standstill about 1,000 yards from the river, and served the enemy as targets to range on, suffered severely; and each successive company as it passed them was heavily punished. Indeed, it was in this medium zone that the principal losses occurred, for as the attacking line came closer the Boer fire grew wild and fitful, and small parties began to leave the rifle-pits on the near bank and move away to right and left. At 9 a.m. the centre of the line, acting upon purely local orders, fixed bayonets and charged right into the abandoned positions, and long before midday the mass of the battalion, trending somewhat to the left, and mingled on the right with parties of the Yorkshires, in the centre with Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and on the left with men of the Black Watch and Seaforths, had also reached the belt of vege-

tation that grew high and dense along the river edge. But here the advance was stayed by the flooded river and the fire from the opposite bank. The only man who succeeded in crossing was the gymnastic sergeant, Cook, whose body was afterwards found amongst the enemy's trenches. [1]

Equally gallant and costly had been the attack of the 1st Yorkshires and the leading companies of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry. On a front of about 600 yards, and in rather closer formation than the West Ridings, these battalions, together with a few men and two officers of the Buffs,[2] had advanced together towards the rocky outcrop that jutted up within 400 yards of the river; and had reached it in spite of the same furious fire about 9 a.m. Like their comrades on the left, the Yorkshires had been mercilessly pounded as they descended the gentle slope; the machine-gun detachment, which, as elsewhere, offered a good mark, suffering considerably. The Oxfordshire Light Infantry were more fortunate, for the ground over which they moved was covered with ant-hills; and the steepness of the incline enabled the rear companies to fire over the heads of those in front. Part of this battalion did not reach the rocks, but remained higher up the slope on the right rear of the West Ridings.

At this juncture General Kelly-Kenny seems to have been convinced of the uselessness of pressing the frontal attack, for the attacking troops were ordered to advance no further. But before the message reached the Yorkshires Major Fearon, with Captains Ferrar and Esson, Lieutenants Jarvis and Brown and sixty men of that regiment and of the Buffs, had rushed down to the river-bank, only to find the enemy on the far side. The fire was extremely hot, and ten of the little party, including an officer, had been killed and another officer wounded before they could take cover in a nullah.

[1] When on the 21st the Shropshire Light Infantry advanced into the river-bed they found bodies lying all along the bank, in one place a group of six of the West Ridings, Yorkshire and Oxfordshire Light Infantrymen.

[2] The three companies of the Buffs remained in reserve, but some of the Maxim detachment apparently finding it impossible to work their gun, seemed to have joined in the rush. At any rate one officer and a few men of that regiment reached the river at the same time as the Yorkshiremen, and another officer was wounded near the bank.

At the same time a party of the Oxfordshires also reached the river bank, losing, besides several men, Lieutenant Bright, killed during the rush; Captain Wyatt, wounded on the river-bank; and Lieutenant Ball-Acton, who fell close to the water's edge. So ended the frontal attack of the 6th Division.

Meanwhile, on the left of the West Ridings Macdonald's Brigade had pressed forward with equal bravery and no better fortune. Colvile, whose first thought after the Mounted Infantry under Martyr and Bainbridge had reported the presence of the enemy in his front, had been to throw the main body of his division on to the right bank and so enable the Cavalry to occupy Koedoesrand, had received a verbal order from Lord Kitchener to prolong the line of the 6th Division to the left and to send him his divisional artillery. At 7.15 a.m. the Highlanders marched eastwards, moving in single rank in file, with four[1] paces interval between each man, so that a simple left turn would bring the whole brigade into attack formation facing the river. The 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders led, closely followed by the 2nd Black Watch, while the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders moved on the right rear or outer flank, ready to support the battalions in front. General Macdonald himself went on with the Howitzer Battery[2] to view the ground.

It must have been about a quarter to eight when the guns came into action on the western slope of the ridge at about 1,500 yards of the river, the leading half-battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland being then in movement across their front, the rear half-battalion in two lines on its left. The former, under Colonel Wilson, continued its march in file along the rearmost companies of West Ridings and Oxfordshires, until it was behind the Yorkshire Regiment, then advancing towards the river-bed. On the extreme northern point of the ridge the leading company came under a heavy fire, and wheeling to the front, pushed forward about 400 yards. The companies

[1] So says General Macdonald in his report of the battle. Actually the extension seems to have been less.

[2] Colvile had recalled the 82nd Battery to shell the Boers in the scrub patch on the right bank near the river bend.

behind conformed, and advanced on its left. No further orders were received or movement made until the evening.

A very different task awaited the rest of the brigade. About 8 a.m. the Black Watch passed the scrub patch, in which Martyr had been fighting and whence he had by that time driven the Boer snipers; and, turning to the front, began to advance into the bend of the river, their left close to the bushes on the bank, their right extending towards the ridge (D). Presumably this order was given by the Brigadier on some previous understanding with Lord Kitchener. The line was prolonged to the right by two companies of the Argyll and Sutherland, and was almost immediately joined by the greater part of the Seaforths, who had been directed by General Macdonald to advance toward the bend that was being attacked by the West Ridings. The result of these movements was that with the exception of five companies[1] the entire brigade west of the ridge became committed to an advance against the river-bed over an absolutely coverless plain about 1,000 yards broad. The front available for the fifteen companies which took part in this operation was roughly a mile in length, and the number of men engaged amounted to barely 1,200 bayonets.[2]

As soon as the Black Watch and the Seaforths turned the angle

[1] Two of Black Watch, two of Seaforths, one of Argyll and Sutherlands. See below.

[2] We do not pretend to be able to give the exact positions of the different companies. It is certain that the left of the line was occupied by the Black Watch, the extreme right by the Argyll and Sutherlands (three companies) who were considerably mixed up with the left companies of the West Ridings. The Seaforths, mingled with the Black Watch and the lefternmost detachments of the West Ridings, were in the centre, mainly, that is, to the west and south-west of the scrub patch marked M on the map. By the end of the day the units had become hopelessly mixed. In one trench on the river bank were several officers and men of the West Ridings, Black Watch, and Yorkshires. The approximate strength of the different battalions was as follows :—

Six companies of the			2nd Black Watch, at 70 men per company... ...	420
Six	,,	,,	2nd Seaforth Highlanders, at 80 men per company...	480
Three	,,	,,	1st Argyll and Sutherland, at 85 men per company...	255
				1,155

Neither in men nor officers had the losses of Magersfontein been made good.

of the river[1] and advanced they came under a furious rifle fire, which grew heavier and deadlier with every forward rush. All round the great bend the enemy's riflemen lay thickly, invisible to the Highlanders, and vomiting an incessant and converging storm of bullets. In this part of the field the Boers, with the exception of a few in the scrub patch (M), were entirely on the left bank; and no nervous shrinking before approaching bayonets such as had aided the West Riding Regiment disturbed the aim of men protected by a swollen stream. But the assailants were not easily checked. For two full hours the thin line, soon reduced to a single rank as the rearmost companies moved up, struggled forward, firing into the trees and bushes along the river.[2] "Thinner and thinner it grew, and thicker and thicker the brown patches on the grass behind it."[3] At last, about 10 a.m., it came to a standstill. The left and centre, reinforced by Colvile at Macdonald's request with three companies of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, was then about 400 yards from the river, still under a heavy fire from the front and enfiladed by Boers who had moved down stream on the left. The right, after suffering severely from the fire of the enemy in the scrub, had occupied it with a company of the Argyll and Sutherland, sent forward by Macdonald's orders. These Boers retired to the river-bed, and, combining with the parties afterwards dislodged by the West Ridings, must have escaped to right or left along the sunken course of the stream. Some small bodies of the Seaforth and Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were joined by the rearmost of the West Ridings and reached the bank, but the main line never got closer than 400 yards. Ammunition, which had been freely used during the advance, now began to give out, and all the efforts of the carriers, who worked splendidly and lost heavily in every portion of the field throughout the day, were unable to replenish the supply. Parched with thirst, and without any cover but what they could dig with their bayonets, the exhausted men could do no more.

[1] B on map.

[2] The German Staff History states that the Highland Brigade never opened fire unti they were within 450 yards of the river.

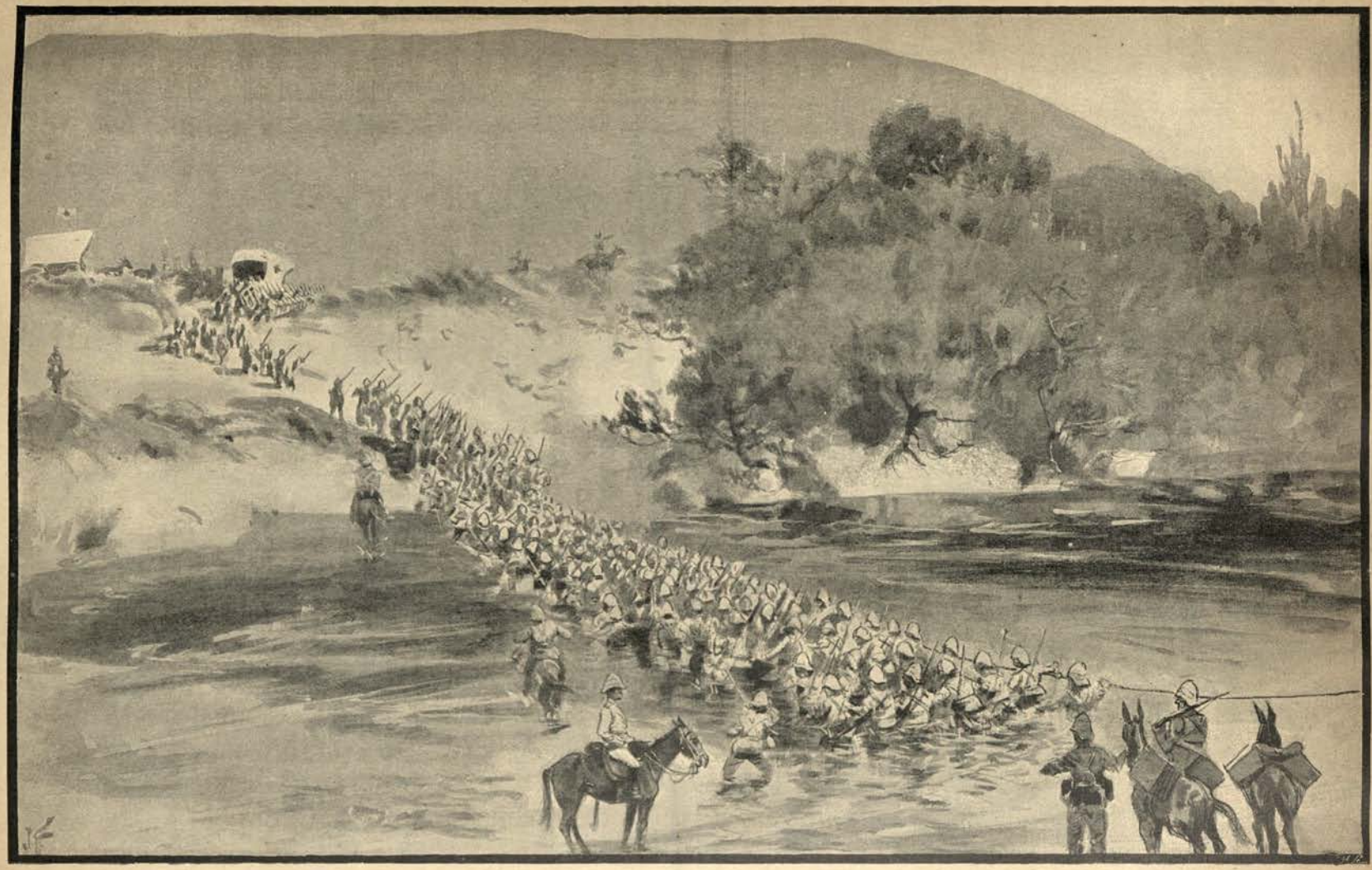
[3] "Work of the Ninth Division," p. 37.

The attack of the 6th Division and Highland Brigade had scarcely been checked when the 19th Brigade, having crossed to the northern bank, began to work round the right flank and rear of the river bend, against the southern front of which Macdonald's men had wasted their strength in vain. On this side fighting had already been in progress for several hours. The first troops to cross were the Mounted Infantry company of the King's Own Scottish Borderers.[1] At 4 a.m. they forced their way through a shoulder-high current, which swept away several of their ponies, and proceeded to reconnoitre the northern bank. The Paardekop and the kopjes to north of it were found unoccupied, and before long the advanced sections joined hands with the Household Cavalry at Roberts's Hill. Soon after, Bainbridge crossed with the rest of the 7th Mounted Infantry, and moving eastward, became seriously engaged with the Boers in the scrub near the large donga.

Colvile's attention, as we have already said, had early been drawn to this part of the field, and at 7.30 a.m., seeing a considerable body of Boers moving in the direction of the scrub belt, he had recalled the 82nd Battery, which was then accompanying the Highland Brigade, and with it shelled the enemy from Signal Hill. An hour later he was ordered by Lord Kitchener to send the 19th Brigade and the guns over the river. In a long close knit file, each man with one arm linked round the shoulder of the next, the 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry led the way. By the time they had crossed ropes had been fixed by the 7th Company of Royal Engineers, and with the help of these and a collapsible boat, the 1st Gordon Highlanders, the Royal Canadian Regiment, and the battery had all passed by a quarter past ten. The 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry remained behind to guard the divisional baggage.

Covered by a company of the 7th Mounted Infantry, Lieut.-Colonel Smith-Dorrien commenced a long encircling movement so as completely to surround the north-western face of the Boer position. Swinging well to the north, until their right was a mile from the river, five companies of the Shropshires occupied Gun Hill at 11.15 a.m.; the Gordons, making a still wider circuit, left the battery on the kopje and moved

[1] 7th Mounted Infantry Regiment.



CANADIANS CROSSING PAARDEBERG DRIFT.

further to the eastward ; while the Canadians wheeled to the right at the drift, thus filling the gap between the right of the Shropshires and the river.

All this time Bainbridge's mounted infantrymen had been fighting hard in the scrub. Aided by a Maxim they had dislodged some of the enemy from the trees, and succeeded in advancing a few hundred yards towards the main donga ; but their losses were very heavy, and as soon as Smith-Dorrien's movements began to develop, their commanding officer withdrew all the men he was able to collect to the drift, after losing three officers, Captain Dewar and Lieutenants Percival and Joliffe killed and one officer wounded, besides a large number of men.

As the 7th Mounted Infantry retired the Canadians and the two remaining companies of the Shropshire Light Infantry began to advance, the Colonials on the left, the Shropshires on the right near the river-bed. Between 10 and 11 a.m. their foremost line was within a mile of the enemy's snipers. In spite of the openness of the ground progress was steady, and an hour and a half later they were heavily engaged with the Boers along the bank. By noon, in spite of many casualties, which included Captain Arnold mortally wounded, the firing line, reinforced to a strength of three companies, and later to four and a half and six, had reached a low rise about half way up the river bend, the right being within 500 and the left within 800 yards of the enemy's position. Here the fire redoubled, and the advance was checked. In front of the left the enemy were so well concealed that their position was not discovered until late in the afternoon. Several times during the morning the word was passed along from the right wing that the left of the line was firing upon it, and some hours elapsed before it was realised that the bullets came from the Boers in the large donga who had already inflicted such heavy losses upon the Mounted Infantry. In spite of the intermittent fire of the 82nd Battery from Gun Hill, and the unbroken musketry of the Shropshires, Canadians, and Highlanders, the enemy's riflemen in the scrub patch were never silenced, and decisively influenced the course of the action on the north bank.

It was mainly due to the efforts of five companies of Highlanders that the right wing of the Canadians penetrated further than the left.

In the early morning, when the Highland Brigade was advancing along the southern bank, Captain Stewart, of the Black Watch, whose company was on the left of the line, caught sight of what he believed to be a Boer gun on the right bank, and resolved to attempt its capture. Aided by Piper Cameron, he succeeded in crossing the river at a point (E) in the middle of the lower bend, and was soon after joined by another company of the Black Watch under Captain Hamilton, and one of the Seaforth Highlanders commanded by Lieutenant McClure; these last having been sent across by Macdonald in the hope of turning the enemy's flank by an advance on the right bank and so relieving the pressure on the main front of the brigade. Extending at right angles to the river-bed and shortly afterwards reinforced by two more companies of the Seaforths and Black Watch, which had passed the stream lower down, Captain Stewart advanced, and in spite of a sharp fire managed with slight loss to establish himself within 400 yards of the large donga which formed the enemy's main position. By this time, however, he had out-distanced the companies struggling forward across the open on the opposite bank and was masking their fire. He was directed to halt, and had to content himself with firing at the donga and at detachments of Boers falling back from the direction of Gun Hill. At 10.30 a company of the 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry joined him; and a company of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders advanced parallel with him along the left bank, filling the gap between the river and the left of the Black Watch on the plain, and ultimately reaching the kraal in the centre of the bend.

With the advance of the Canadians and a company of Martyr's Mounted Infantry on the left rear of Stewart the fire grew hotter, and losses all along the line were continuous. Captain Hamilton, who had already been wounded, was again struck, Lieutenants McClure and Courtney were mortally wounded, Lieutenant Gricoe[1] was killed, and Captain Gubbins, of the Shropshire Light Infantry, was shot in the foot. Two companies of the last-named regiment, which had advanced from Gun Hill on the north side of the donga, were also severely punished.

[1] An Australian officer attached to the Black Watch.

For a considerable time no further forward movement was attempted, and until late in the afternoon the long enveloping line lay firing at the "hateful patch of scrub" without gaining an inch on the stubborn enemy who held it.

Thus by midday, with the exception of a battalion and a half[1] which were guarding the baggage and three companies of the Buffs which had remained in reserve behind the 1st Yorkshire Regiment, the whole of the infantry on the south bank were in action; and of these three-fourths were so closely engaged that it was impossible to withdraw them for employment elsewhere. The Artillery had more than enough to do, and the Mounted Infantry were scattered in all parts of the field. The ill-fortune which had dogged us throughout the earlier part of the war seemed to have returned to our arms. General Macdonald had been wounded; and the messenger sent to Colonel Hughes-Hallett, of the Seaforth Highlanders, to inform him that he was to take command of the Highland Brigade, found him in a similar condition, though he was still able to undertake the duty. Colonel Yorstoun,[2] of the Black Watch, and Colonel Bowles, of the 1st Yorkshire Regiment, had both been hit early in the day, and many officers of minor rank had been killed or wounded. Under such circumstances many soldiers would have despaired of success, and thought only of extricating their exhausted troops, but Lord Kitchener, still unconvinced of the impossibility of the task and well aware of the advantages which would accrue from victory, was determined to persevere. The frontal assault had failed, but hoping better things of an attack from the flanks he proceeded at once to collect all the troops available for a fresh attempt.[3]

About 1 p.m. he rode across to Signal Hill and asked Colvile if he had any troops to spare for a more determined assault. The latter had only three companies of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry unengaged, and these he was directed to send over the river to rush

[1] Half of the Buffs, part of the 2nd Gloucester Regiment, and three companies of the 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

[2] This officer remained with his battalion.

[3] Some time in the afternoon Lord Kitchener suggested that the Cavalry should cross the river; but as Gordon had not come up and as such a movement would have opened a way of escape to the enemy, General French rightly resolved to remain where he was.

the position in front of the Canadians. At the same time the Chief of the Staff urged on the concentration of the troops scattered around the drifts above the laager for an attack on the eastern flank. It had at first been intended that the Mounted Infantry should co-operate with Stephenson's Brigade in a general attack upon that side of the enemy's position; but the infantry, having become engaged with the Boers east of Osfontein, were not available; and for some hours Hannay contented himself with a long-range fire fight, waiting for the Welsh and Essex Regiments to put in an appearance. During the morning his troops, as at Klip Kraal, had become considerably dispersed; and it was not until midday that the 6th Mounted Infantry, moving on both banks, drew nearer the laager and that Hannay having collected the 5th Mounted Infantry and parties of the 4th and 7th [1] at Vanderberg's Drift advanced to support De Lisle. Shortly after 1 p.m. the Essex Regiment, which had been rejoined by the three companies detached to Kitchener's Kop, also moved towards the laager, and early in the afternoon delivered an attack, in company with some of De Lisle's Mounted Infantry, along the southern bank. Passing the dongas which had sheltered the Welsh in the morning, the troops deployed and made a gallant effort to reach the enemy; but a heavy fire brought the leading companies to a halt within 300 yards of the position; [2] one officer of the Mounted Infantry was killed and two officers of the same corps and three of the Essex Regiment were wounded. About the same hour the Welsh Regiment was directed to withdraw from its position about Vanderberg's Drift; and leaving two companies with the 81st Battery, the remainder retired for a time to the dongas behind the firing line of the Essex and the Mounted Infantry.

The failure of the attack on the southern bank left only one other line on the eastern flank unattempted. Instructions had already been sent to Hannay to collect all the available Mounted Infantry on the

[1] The Norfolk company of the 7th Mounted Infantry had been told off to escort one of the batteries and so became separated from its regiment.

[2] The enemy had only a few trenches on the south bank during the 18th. It is not clear why this attack was made before the troops on the right or northern bank were ready to co-operate.

northern bank, and about 3 p.m. these were repeated with the addition that the laager must be rushed at all costs.[1]

These orders were hardly issued before a fresh complication arose on the right rear of the British line. The return of the 4th Mounted Infantry[2] to the river, and the withdrawal of the Essex companies from Kitchener's Kop had left the single squadron of Kitchener's Horse in sole custody of that most important position. Either because they believed that the kopjes in front were still held by the Mounted Infantry, or more probably from sheer want of discipline, these men descended to the hill to Osfontein Farm, off-saddled, and were proceeding to water their horses, when they were surprised by the sudden appearance of De Wet's Commando which had ridden up from Petrusberg. The horses were stampeded at the first volley, most of the squadron killed or taken prisoners, and the enemy occupied the hill with 300 riflemen and a Vickers-Maxim.

The moment was specially opportune. The baggage of the 6th Division, which had remained for the greater part of the day at the bivouac of the preceding night, had just been ordered to the hollow east of the ridge from which the frontal attack had been made, and at the time when the enemy brought up their pom-pom was only about 2,000 yards from the Kop. A heavy fire was poured on the mass of animals and waggons, on the field hospital close by, and on the group of officers around Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny. Some 300 native refugees from the laager, who were with the transport, fled in a panic, and the baggage, covered by five companies of the Gloucester Regiment, was hurried back to the spot from whence it had come. At first it was supposed that the enemy were only a small party, and sixty men of the 8th Mounted Infantry were ordered to gallop round the north side of the Kop and cut them off. In hot haste the horsemen dashed off,

[1] Hannay had reported that it was useless to attack the laager with the Mounted Infantry alone. "This report," says the German Staff History, "reached Lord Kitchener about 1.30 p.m., at the moment when he was affected by the check inflicted on the 6th Divison and in an obviously excited condition." The result was the order to rush the laager.

[2] Colonel Hannay's order was received by the 4th Mounted Infantry at 3.30 p.m.; they crossed the river half an hour later.

swept round the hill, and occupied some low, stony hillocks south of Osfontein Farm, only to be overwhelmed by a sudden and deadly fire. All their horses except one were shot, and over thirty men killed and wounded, but the survivors managed to hold out till dark, and escaped back to camp.

Meanwhile the Boers on the Kop fired away merrily, scattering bullets round the 76th Battery on the ridge, which was obliged to wheel two sections to reply. The three foremost companies of the Buffs, which had lain in support on the ridge behind the Yorkshire Regiment and at about 2 p.m. had received orders to attack, had only advanced a short distance down the slope when they were recalled, and with the rest of the battalion,[1] and later on the greater part of the Gloucesters, were sent to cover the right rear of the army against the new enemy. They took up a line facing Kitchener's Kop and held it during the rest of the day and the following night, having succeeded, with the assistance of the 76th Battery, in silencing the hostile fire before darkness fell. But the Kop remained in the hands of De Wet. Between him and the south-east corner of Cronje's position were only the two companies of the Welsh Regiment, whose presence there, so far as the higher command was concerned, was purely accidental, and whose numbers were of course totally inadequate to prevent the Boer forces from joining hands.

The seizure of Kitchener's Kop had been accompanied by renewed activity on the part of the Boers to the north-east of Osfontein. The 81st Battery, which still held its position to the west of Vanderberg's Drift, had just received orders to retire, and had brought up its teams, when a sudden and heavy rifle and pom-pom fire burst out from Osfontein Farm and the hills on either side of it. The enemy's snipers had crept up unobserved, and before the horses could be got under cover over twenty were killed and wounded. To withdraw was impossible, and to make matters worse ammunition was running out, so that the guns could only make a slow and ineffective reply. Later on, as night was approaching, other Boers crept down the river-bed, now evacuated

[1] Major-General Knox was wounded about this time, the command of the 13th Brigade devolving on Colonel Hickson, of the Buffs.

by the Mounted Infantry, and poured a hail of bullets amongst the guns, wounding nine artillerymen in a few minutes. Fortunately the battery, assisted by its escort,[1] managed to silence this dangerous fire; and at nightfall it fell back with five rounds in its limbers.

While this fighting was in progress round Kitchener's Kop, the last British attacks were launched on either flank of Cronje's position. The first of these, which resulted in the death of Colonel Hannay, was marked by the overhaste and inadequacy of strength which throughout the day had been but too characteristic of our tactics. Considerably handicapped by the want of staff officers,[2] the Colonel had, in obedience to Lord Kitchener's orders, pushed forward all the Mounted Infantry he was able to muster. By 4 p.m., the 6th Regiment was lying within 300 yards of the laager on both sides of the river; fragments of the 5th and the Norfolk Company were slowly advancing against the north-eastern point of the Boer trenches, and the 4th was crossing to the right bank to support them.

Suddenly through the intervals of the 5th, Colonel Hannay was seen to gallop towards the laager, followed by about forty men of different regiments, some of them without rifles or ammunition, and all of them mounted. Of this devoted party few returned. Lieutenant Hankey, of the 6th Regiment, was killed; Roberts, of the 7th, was wounded; Coulson had his horse shot. Of the men who followed them nearly twenty were killed and wounded; and those were fortunate whose horses fell before they themselves were struck down. Their brave leader, who was riding a big English horse, outstripped his men, and was within 300 yards of the enemy when a shower of bullets brought man and horse to the ground. A more hopeless charge was never attempted nor more unflinchingly executed. As the consequence of Lord Kitchener's final order it amply demonstrates the risk which is run by the general who, while himself distant from the point of combat, issues over-definite instructions to his subordinates. Had the Chief of the Staff been with

[1] Two companies of the Welsh Regiment and one company of Gordon Mounted Infantry belonging to De Lisle's regiment.

[2] His aide-de-camp, Captain Malcolm, had been severely wounded, and his staff officer, Colonel Mitford, was absent on the southern bank.

Hannay on the river-bed, it is very unlikely that such an order would have been given. How far it is possible for an inferior to disregard a distinct command on the ground of its impracticability is a question which cannot be decided by rule.

The reinforcements, for which Colonel Hannay had been unable to wait, were now approaching. The first to come up were the 4th Mounted Infantry, who turned away from the river, and taking advantage of folds in the veldt, established themselves to northward of the laager, their right at dusk touching the track from Wolvekraal to Kameelfontein. Later on they were joined by parts of the 5th, 6th, and 7th Mounted Infantry; and here, at nightfall, their ammunition exhausted, some 300 worn-out men lay down on their arms to rest.

Just as the attacks of the Mounted Infantry came to an end, Stephenson's infantry at last reached the northern bank. About 4 p.m. General Kelly-Kenny, who seems to have witnessed Hannay's disastrous attack, ordered the Welsh and Essex to ford the river and assault the Boer position without delay. Only three companies of the Welsh and four of the Essex were available, but the crossing was promptly effected, and by five o'clock they were rapidly advancing. In three lines, each consisting of one company, and extended to intervals of ten paces, the Welsh Regiment, with the half-battalion of the Essex Regiment in support on their left rear, soon reached a low rise 1,000 yards from the laager. On topping this they at once came under fire, and were drawn nearer to the river by order of the Brigadier, who soon afterwards sent the Essex into the bed of the stream. With intervals much reduced by the change of direction the Welsh continued to advance, charged and cleared some copses on their right front, and then, with the three lines merged into one, went straight for the main position in the teeth of a hail of shot. Alternately rushing and firing, the line got within 600 yards of the ragged line of scrub and rifle-pits that covered Cronje's waggons, their colonel being wounded and men falling in every direction. Unsupported by fresh troops, the attack came to a standstill, and the shattered companies, their leaders fallen and their impetus lost, sank down to wait for night. Some idea of the difficulty of observation in the widespread network of modern battle may

be gathered from the fact that, unknown to the Welsh Regiment, part of the 6th Mounted Infantry were lying half-way between their firing line and the laager, and that several men were struck from behind by the bullets of their comrades.

The Essex had no better success. Crowded in the river-bed, they had worked forward to a level with the Mounted Infantry and their own companies which had been left on the south bank; but all attempts to charge across the open bank proved useless in face of the rifle fire, and just before dark they were withdrawn to the pont or ferry 1,000 yards to the rear. Here, in the course of the evening, they were rejoined by those companies of the Welsh Regiment which had taken part in the attack, and by the two which had acted as escort to the 81st Battery. The remaining half battalion of the Essex fell back to the friendly dongas on the southern bank.

Almost at the same hour that had witnessed the attack of the Welsh took place the last effort on the western flank. The order to cross the river and to attack had reached the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry at 2 p.m., but at the instance of their commanding officer, Colonel Aldworth, it was agreed to postpone it until the troops had had some food. Aware of the desperate nature of the service, he spoke to his men before they started, telling them that they were to have the honour of leading the decisive attack, "a charge that would be known for all time to come as the Cornish Charge." Then under the guidance of Colonel Ewart[1] they moved down to the river and crossed it where the Highlanders had passed in the morning, Aldworth himself being the first to enter the stream. In three extended lines, with 150 yards between each company, they gained the belt of scrub held by the firing line of the Canadians; and their commander went up to arrange details with Colonel Otter, announcing "that he had been sent to finish the business, and intended doing so with the bayonet." The Cornwalls advanced into the firing line, each company as it appeared being received with an outburst of fire from the line of scrub 600 yards in front.[2] The Canadians were reinforced and the Highland companies near the river-bed fixed bayonets and made ready to join

[1] Sir Henry Colvile's Chief of Staff.

[2] Marked L on map.

the attack as soon as it came on a level with them. A few minutes after five o'clock Colonel Aldworth gave the word, and the long glittering line of bayonets went forward with a rush that nothing seemed able to stop. Their loud shouts rang far along the British front, and at the sound the Black Watch, still prostrate on the opposite bank, ceased firing, for fear lest their bullets should strike the charging infantry. Far back on Signal Hill General Colvile's staff heard the cheering, and to their anxious gaze it seemed as if the position was won. But the crash of Mauser fire soon drowned the cries of the assailants. An advanced party of the enemy, who had been lying in a small detached patch of scrub in front of the main position, did indeed give way; but the Boers in the angle of the river-bed and in the donga never flinched. As the British musketry ceased and the bugles sounded the charge the banks were crowded with riflemen, many springing to their feet to get a better view of the oncoming troops. For 200 yards the Cornwalls and Canadians, Mounted Infantry and the rearmost of the Highlanders, dashed on through a fire that strewed the ground with fallen men. No attempt was made to advance by alternate rushes or to reply to the still distant enemy. In dead silence, save for the quick panting of the men, and the hum and thud of bullets, the wave of attack surged onwards, here jagged and broken, there shooting forward, as the superior speed or resolution of individuals carried them ahead of their comrades. In front of all, closely followed by a few devoted officers and men of his own regiment, ran Colonel Aldworth. As he was calling his men on he was struck in the chest, and fell forward on his face. But though the hurt was mortal, the brave spirit was not subdued. Raising himself on one elbow, he gasped out, "Go on men and finish it," and then sank down with a bullet through his brain. His body marked the limit of the advance. Two of his officers fell beside him, 20 per cent. of the rank and file lay scattered behind. Between the foremost of his followers and the enemy still stretched 400 yards of open ground, and, blown and exhausted, the men dropped down and began replying to the fire. The attack had failed.[1]

[1] The actual losses of the Cornwalls in the charge were three officers and fifty-four men killed and wounded. The three companies employed on the south bank lost four officers and twenty-five men.

Slowly the welcome night came down on that stubbornly contested field. Shortly before dusk orders were issued for a retirement, and in the gathering darkness the shattered battalions staggered back to safety. About 7 p.m. the 1st Yorkshire and the 1st Oxfordshire Light Infantry regained the ridge from which they had advanced, whether by reason of mutual exhaustion or want of light, unmolested by the enemy. The Highland Brigade rallied at Signal Hill, leaving a strong cordon of sentries along the space between that point and the left of the Oxfordshires to prevent the enemy breaking out. Smith-Dorrien, who throughout the day had handled his troops with excellent judgment, withdrew the Gordons from the position they had held on the north-west of the laager, and sent them back to Paardeberg Drift. The Shropshires remained at Gun Hill. The artillery of the 9th Division returned to Signal Hill. Late at night the Canadian Regiment went into bivouac at Paardeberg Drift, their collecting parties having been sniped at until ten o'clock. At the same hour Lieutenant Fife, of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, who had himself fallen wounded near Colonel Aldworth, found his commander's body, and with the aid of a few men carried it away.

By midnight all the troops, with the exception of the West Riding and the Highland Companies on the right bank who had received no order to retire, were in bivouac, some of them suffering terribly from thirst, for those who had not actually reached the river had had no water during the day, and in the confusion of the night many had not been able to find the water-carts. The West Ridings remained at the river bank during the whole of the night, and retired in broad daylight next morning in full sight of the enemy, who fired not a single shot at them. The reason of this is probably explained by the fact that negotiations were then in progress between Lord Kitchener and Cronje. The Highland Companies held the ground they had occupied near the river-bed, and after reconnoitring the positions evacuated by the enemy during the night, retired at 10 a.m. on the following morning.

Opinions will probably always differ as to the quality of the British generalship during this long and costly struggle. At present, owing to want of information, it is not practicable to follow, and therefore to

judge with even approximate accuracy, the views of the commanding officer as the fight swayed to and fro in front of him. It is hard to believe that it will ever be possible to justify the management of an action which was marked by inadequacy of reconnaissance, lack of plan, and want of co-operation between the different arms. Lord Kitchener's remark to the American Attaché, "If I had known yesterday what I know to-day, I would not have attacked the Boers in the river-bed; it is impossible against that rifle," proves that at the commencement he had altogether failed to realise the power of modern weapons, and that had he done so he would have materially modified his plan of attack; though we believe that in any case he would have attacked, and would have been right in attacking. How strong his resolution was, and how great was the importance that he attached to immediate victory, may be realised from the fact that on the day after the battle he was still in favour of attempting a night attack upon the laager with the intact part of the 19th Brigade, and only refrained from executing the project on the urgent representations of its commander.

But taking Lord Kitchener's non-appreciation of the power of modern firearms for granted, there are several other matters which, although they may have been partially due to the same misconception, still call for explanation. Why, for instance, were the 13th and Highland Brigades launched to the attack of a position covered by a river which was believed to be unfordable?[1] The presumable answer is that it was supposed that Boers were on the near bank, as at the Modder River; but unfortunately this condition only obtained here in a minor degree, and the state of the river rendered such a plan of defence, which would have almost isolated a considerable part of Cronje's force, unlikely. Even had the Boer general elected to hold both banks equally the occupation of the one would not have rendered the other untenable, and the contest could not have ended favourably until both were in our hands.[2]

The question as to why the frontal attack was so hurriedly

[1] A belief which, so far as the attacking force was concerned, proved in the main perfectly correct. [2] As was proved in the case of the West Riding Regiment.

developed when better lines of advance were available along the river banks, is equally difficult to answer satisfactorily; if, as there seems good reason to think, Lord Kitchener's decision was not precipitated by any fear that Cronje would attempt to escape. Exact co-operation on so wide a field of battle was, and probably always will be, impossible, but it is the right thing to try for, and in the development of the action there is scarcely any trace of an attempt to make the frontal and flanking attacks coincide.[1] On the eastern side, indeed, the diversion of the bulk of Stephenson's troops to meet the Boers north-east of Osfontein rendered combination impracticable from the first; and, moreover, the direction of the frontal attack inevitably separated the centre and the right wing. But co-operation was possible between the frontal and left attacks. Admitting that the Boer right was not, having regard to Cronje's natural line of retreat, the best strategic objective, the position of the 6th and 9th Divisions certainly favoured a simultaneous encircling onslaught against that part of his position. Yet the order for the 19th Brigade to cross the river reached Colvile an hour and a half after the advance against the Boer front began, and by the time Smith-Dorrien's movement had developed the advance of the 13th and Highland Brigades had come to a standstill. No doubt this difference in time, owing to the great extent of the Boer position and the delaying power of modern weapons, was not accompanied by such great disadvantages as, for instance, attended the want of unison in the British attack at Orthez; it did not, in other words, favour Cronje's dispositions in the same degree that the delay of the flanking columns at that battle favoured those of Soult. But concerted action is still recognised as a matter of the utmost importance, and the fact of its absence in the case under discussion suggests that the attack of the 19th Brigade was due to an afterthought, and was not a part of the original plan. Nor does it seem that in the order given to the Canadians the necessity of attack

[1] It is fair to remember that the great dispersion of the 6th Division and the practical withdrawal of the Highland Brigade from General Colvile's control probably affected the distribution of orders. Some units seem to have been left without instructions for many hours together.

was emphasised in anything like the same degree as is noticeable in those issued to the 13th Brigade and the Yorkshire Regiment. At any rate, whether the more deliberate handling of the 19th Brigade was solely due to Smith-Dorrien, or in part to the more judicious directions of his superiors, the management of the Shropshires, Cornwalls, and Canadians compares very favourably with that of most of the other troops. It contrasts, perhaps, most strongly with that of the eastern attack, where no less than three distinct attacks were delivered at different moments by different bodies of troops unsupported by artillery fire. The repetition over the whole field of battle of the errors of haste and lack of co-ordination must, in the main, be attributed to the same failings in the central command. It would seem that at the first Lord Kitchener was dominated by the belief that the enemy's *morale* had been fatally shattered by the events of the preceding days and that they were not in a position to offer serious resistance. While on the one hand he regarded tactical success as assured, on the other he saw in the general strategical situation the great advantages that would be gained by rapidity. Throughout the day, even when his first expectations were not realised, the need of immediate success was always before his eyes. From this and from his misapprehension of the tactical difficulties must have arisen the orders which hurried his subordinates into premature and disjointed action.

This last point leads to the delicate question of the distribution of orders, of the amount of influence separately exercised on the action by Lord Kitchener and by General Kelly-Kenny, and of the degree in which, at different periods, their divergent opinions gained the upper hand. Except that the commander of the 6th Division did not approve of the frontal attack, and that he ultimately sent orders to stop it, nothing is known; and a clear view is further obstructed by the fact that no mention is made in either his dispatch or in that of General Macdonald of any definite orders to assault. But if, as seems very probable, a forward and a backward policy were struggling for the mastery throughout the day, another powerful factor of success was arrayed on the side of the enemy.[1]

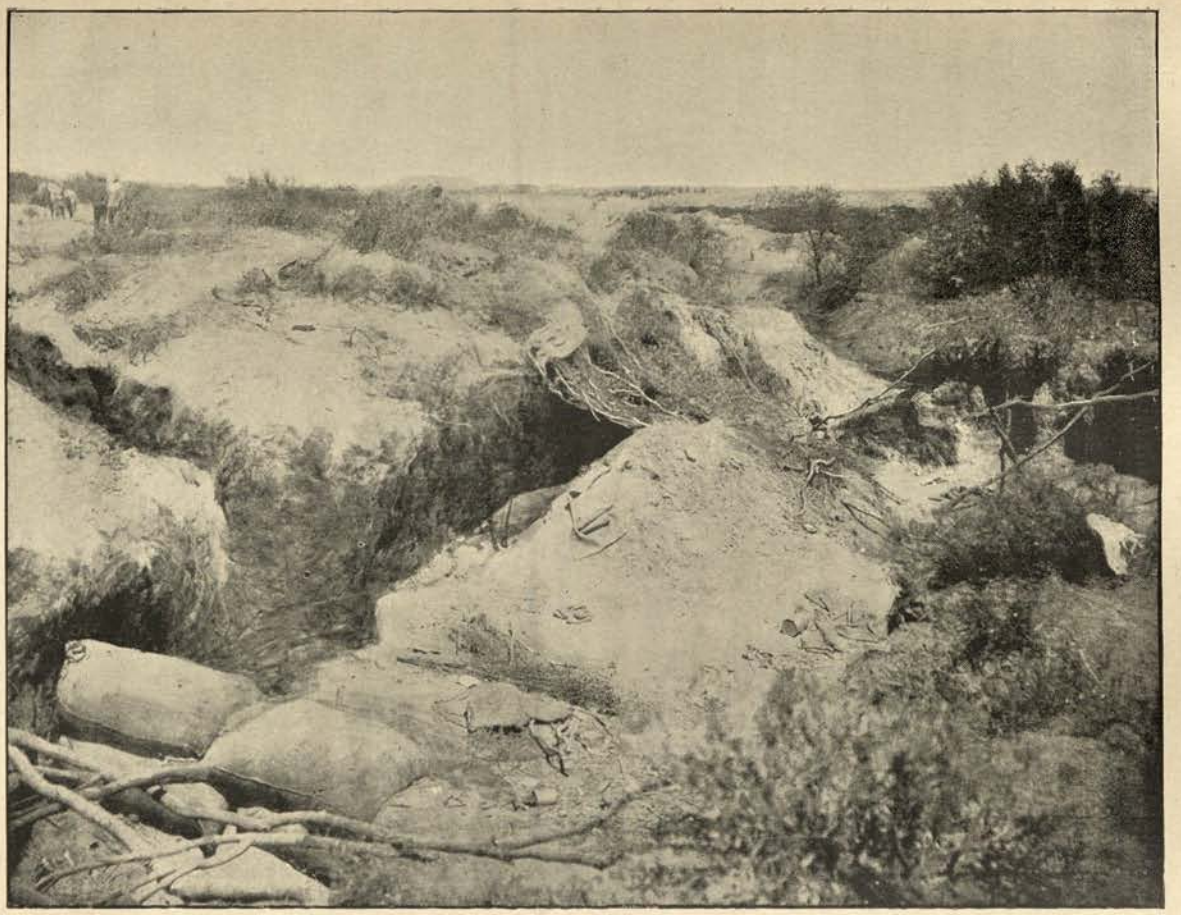
[1] The German Staff History refers to the fact that Lord Kitchener frequently sent

As at Klip Kraal, the presence of Lord Kitchener, whatever its value—and so powerful a personality ensured the adoption of a bold forward policy at the moment when energy and dash were of the utmost importance—seems to have carried with it some of the grave disadvantages which are inseparable from divided councils and a somewhat vaguely defined responsibility.

What measure of success would have been achieved by strong attacks pushed along the river-bed it is impossible to say. The German Staff History lays great stress on the want of depth in the infantry formation, and on the tendency to trust to simple assault instead of to fire effect. The first factor was not present equally throughout the field; some battalions attacked in several lines; others in almost a single rank. But there seems little doubt that in most cases the fire-preparation was over hasty; indeed, it may be questioned whether a gradual intensifying and concentrating of fire by means of successive reinforcement of the fighting line was at the time generally recognised as a necessary stage of the attack. On no part of the enemy's line, so far as we have been able to learn, was a noticeable impression made by fire. No doubt this result was partly due to the plentiful cover and constant supply of water with which the Boers were provided; partly also to the absence of an adequate artillery preparation. It seems dangerous to infer, as the German History appears to do, that what was possible at Driefontein was also possible at Paardeberg. On the other hand, the event of this ill-managed action cannot be taken as a proof that Cronje's position was impregnable to well-directed attack. The chances of an overwhelming victory were at the beginning good enough; they were lost owing to a general misapprehension of the situation.

It is pleasant to pass on from the question of generalship to a brief reference to the behaviour of the troops themselves. We have already endeavoured to give some account of the constant exertions and hardships of the troops during the week that preceded the battle. Of serious fighting, with the exception of the long and trying action

his orders direct to the battalions; a course which rendered hearty co-operation on the part of the Divisional and Brigade Commanders impossible, and was strongly resented.



BOER TRENCHES AT PAARDEBERG.

at Klip Kraal, in which only one out of the four brigades engaged at Paardeberg had fought, there had been none. But from the moment when the troops left the railway heat, cold, thirst, hunger, fatigue, and want of sleep had been their daily portion. By many the night before the battle had been spent in marching; the men of neither division had had much rest, and some units had gone into action with scarcely any sleep at all. The greater part of the force had been on the move or under an almost incessant fire for twelve hours, under a burning sun, almost without food, and in many cases entirely without water. During that time the 12,000 men who actually took part in the fight had lost 10 per cent. of their numbers, some units losing over 20 and some 30 per cent. Throughout the action they one and all had borne themselves with uncomplaining fortitude, and up to the very end, as witness the last attacks of the Canadians and the Welsh Regiment, had carried out the most desperate services with splendid dash and courage. Well might Colonel Henderson, in his eloquent vindication of the voluntary principle, maintain that if, after pondering such performances as these, foreign critics still saw no cause to doubt the superiority of the conscript, they knew little of war.[1]

TABLE OF CASUALTIES AT PAARDEBERG, FEBRUARY 18TH.

	Officers.			Men.		
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.
Staff	1	2	—	—	—	—
6th Division—						
13th Brigade.						
1st Oxfordshire Light Infantry	2	4	—	5	31	—
1st West Riding Regiment ...	1	2	—	20	102	—
2nd East Kent Regiment ...	—	1	—	2	14	2
2nd Gloucester Regiment ...	—	—	—	—	—	—
18th Brigade.						
1st Yorkshire Regiment ...	1	4	—	41	84	3
1st Essex Regiment	—	3	—	11	42	3
1st Welsh Regiment	1	5	1	8	62	7
9th Division—						
3rd Brigade.						
1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	—	5	—	13	75	—
2nd Seaforth Highlanders ...	1	6	—	38	110	—
2nd Black Watch	1	4	—	13	77	—
Total...	8	36	1	151	597	15

[1] Introduction to the English translation of Count Sternberg's "Experiences of the Boer War."

TABLE OF CASUALTIES AT PAARDEBERG, FEBRUARY 18TH (*continued*)—

	Officers.			Men.		
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.
Carried forward	8	36	1	151	597	15
19th Brigade.						
2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry	3	4	—	13	66	—
1st Gordon Highlanders ...	—	2	—	2	15	—
2nd Shropshire Light Infantry	—	4	—	8	37	—
2nd Royal Canadian Regiment	1	1	—	19	62	—
Royal Artillery—65th, 76th, 81st, 82nd Batteries ...	—	—	1	2	12	1
Royal Engineers	—	—	—	1	5	—
Mounted Infantry—						
2nd Regiments	1	1	—	2	20	—
[1] 4th „	1	—	—	?	?	?
5th „	1	—	—	1	5	?
[2] 6th „	2	2	—	10	20	—
7th „	3	1	—	35	50	
[3] 8th „	—	--	—	10?	25?	—
New South Wales Mounted Infantry	—	—	—	—	2	—
[4] Kitchener's Horse	—	—	—	?	?	?
R.A.M.C.	—		—	?	?	?
Total [5] ...	20	51	2	254	916	16

[1] 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, 2nd Shropshire Light Infantry, 1st Yorkshire Companies of Mounted Infantry included in the casualties of their battalions.

[2] 1st Gordon Highlanders and 1st Welsh Companies of Mounted Infantry included in the casualties of their battalions.

[3] About thirty-five casualties in all, distribution uncertain.

[4] Lost forty-three killed, wounded, and taken at Kitchener's Kop, and others in front of laager; probably 50–60 killed, wounded and captured in all.

[5] Lord Roberts gives in his dispatch No. 3 the following figures. He fears that most of the missing are dead.

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Prisoners.
Officers	15	54	8	3
Men	183	851	88	9

Our own totals, therefore, show 7 less officers and 64 more men than those of Lord Roberts. It will be seen that the above tables are in several instances incomplete. See footnote on p. 378.

CHAPTER XV

THE SURRENDER OF CRONJE

MEASURES TAKEN BY LORD ROBERTS ON THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 18TH—HIS ARRIVAL AT PAARDEBERG—POSITION OF CRONJE—REASON OF HIS IMMOBILITY—POSITIONS OF THE BRITISH TROOPS ON THE 19TH—OPERATIONS ROUND KITCHENER'S KOP—ARRIVAL OF THE 14TH BRIGADE—ADVANCE OF THE SHROPSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY WEST OF CRONJE'S LAAGER—RECONNAISSANCE IN FORCE ON THE 20TH—NIGHT MARCH OF THE LINCOLNS AND KING'S OWN SCOTTISH BORDERERS—SURPRISED NEAR THE LAAGER ON THE MORNING OF THE 21ST—OPERATIONS OF FRENCH AGAINST KITCHENER'S KOP—MOVEMENT OF BROADWOOD—RETREAT AND ESCAPE OF THE ENEMY—DISTRIBUTION OF THE ARMY IN AN OUTER AND AN INNER RING—RESERVES LEFT AT JACOBSDAL—ARRIVAL OF PORTER—BOER ATTACK OF THE 23RD ON KITCHENER'S KOP REPULSED—SITUATION OF THE ARMY—WANT OF FOOD AND FORAGE—DEMOBILISATION OF THE MOUNTED TROOPS—IMPORTANT EFFECTS OF CRONJE'S RESISTANCE—ADVANCE OF THE TRENCHES ON EITHER FLANK—THE BOMBARDMENT OF THE 22ND—HOW FAR EFFECTIVE—INCREASING DIFFICULTY OF CRONJE'S SITUATION—WANT OF DOCTORS—MUTINY IN HIS CAMP—FEBRUARY 26TH, FRESH ADVANCE OF THE WESTERN ATTACK DECIDED ON—RUMOUR THAT CRONJE WAS ABOUT TO ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE—DISPOSITIONS OF THE ARMY—ADVANCE OF THE CANADIANS AND ENGINEERS—MORNING OF MAJUBA DAY—CRONJE'S SURRENDER—APPEARANCE OF THE BOER ARMY—EFFECTS OF HIS CAPTURE—IMMEDIATE ADVANCE ON BLOEMFONTEIN IMPRACTICABLE.

EARLY on the evening of the 18th Lord Roberts became acquainted with the unfavourable result of the fight at Paardeberg, and realising the seriousness of the situation took instant measures to reinforce Lord Kitchener.[1] The 14th Brigade of Infantry, under Chermside, together with the guns of the Naval Brigade [2] and the 18th, 62nd, and 75th Batteries, left Jacobsdal at 9.30 p.m. for Paardeberg; and at midnight the Guards started from the Modder Camp for Klip

[1] The Army order of the day contemplates the advance of the 15th Brigade, the 83rd, 84th, and 85th Field Batteries, and four 6″ Howitzers to Rondavel Drift on the 22nd, and to Klip Kraal Drift on the 23rd. This can only be regarded as a movement to cover the communications of the army with Kimberley and the Modder. The order was obviously issued early in the day, or at least before Lord Kitchener's report arrived. The German Staff History states that in his report the chief of the staff pressed earnestly for reinforcements.

[2] Four 4·7″ guns and three 12-pounders.

Drift. The Field-Marshal himself left Jacobsdal at 4 a.m. on the morning of the 19th, passed the 14th Brigade at Klip Kraal Drift three hours later, and after six hours' steady riding reached the scene of the encounter of the preceding day.

The positions of the troops had altered little during the hours that followed the close of the action. Cronje, the greater part of whose horses had been killed by the British shrapnel, had made no attempt to break out, although De Wet's occupation of Kitchener's Kop and the wide gap which extended between the battalions of the 18th Brigade in the river-bed east of the laager and the right of the main body of the 6th Division rendered the success of such an operation practically certain. The only hostile body that lay between him and his lieutenant were the two companies of the Welsh Regiment; and his chances of escape were greatly improved by the condition of the troops on the right and left. All the men in that part of the field were grievously exhausted; and the wide area over which the action had raged had left many units scattered and dispersed in positions unknown to their proper commanders or out of reach of their immediate control. Had the Boer general acted vigorously, there appears no reason why the majority of his mounted or dismounted men should not have gained the shelter of the hills before dawn. But Cronje seems scarcely to have given the idea a moment's consideration. His resolution to stay with his waggons remained unshaken. As a large number of the oxen were destroyed, and as without fresh teams it would have been impossible to move the laager, we are forced to conclude that he really hoped that the relieving forces would be able to drive the British from the vicinity and replace the loss of the animals. Such views were certainly not shared by De Wet, who already realised that in the abandonment of the laager lay the only hope of safety.

When Lord Roberts reached Lord Kitchener's headquarters he found negotiations in progress, which showed that Cronje contemplated no immediate movement. Early in the morning the Boer general had asked for an armistice of twenty-four hours, for the ostensible purpose of burying his dead and collecting his wounded. Whether this was the real reason, or whether, as Lord Roberts suspected, the demand was

an artifice to gain time, or simply put forward in the hope of enabling the Boers to clear their camp of the dead bodies and make their position, which was already becoming horribly unsanitary, somewhat more tolerable, is uncertain; but Lord Kitchener did not consider himself empowered to grant or refuse the request, and confined himself to a promise not to attack the laager until the reply of the Commander-in-Chief had been received. The latter, as soon as he arrived, demanded an unconditional surrender, to which Cronje returned an answer by the hand of Captain Liebmann, which was wrongly translated as follows: "Since you are so unmerciful as not to accord me the time asked for, nothing remains for me but to do as you wish." To this Lord Roberts replied, accepting the supposed surrender; and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Black Watch were ordered to move down to the river-bed to receive the prisoners. A white flag now appeared in the laager, and the troops rose cheering and began to advance. Scarcely, however, had they topped the ridge when a sharp fire was opened upon them, and the sergeant who accompanied Liebmann had his horse shot. The infantry were recalled, fortunately without suffering any casualties; and soon afterwards Lord Roberts received Cronje's second message,[1] which scouted the idea of surrender. The Field-Marshal then rode out to make a reconnaissance in person. In view of the advance of hostile reinforcements and the unfavourable effects of a delay, he still contemplated terminating the business by a renewed attack; and it was not until the next day, after a more detailed examination of the enemy's position, that he resolved, in view of the heavy losses that an assault would entail, to content himself with beating off the attacks from outside. He adopted this policy the more willingly because he thought that the defeat of the Boer reinforcements would render Cronje's early surrender inevitable.[2]

On the afternoon of the 19th he ordered a bombardment of the laager; and from four o'clock until dusk the batteries, now reinforced

[1] Cronje's second message read as follows: "Since you are so unmerciful as not to accord the time asked for, nothing remains for me to do; you do as you wish. During my lifetime I will never surrender. If you wish to bombard, fire away. Dixi." (See report of the American attaché on the operations in South Africa, p. 30.)

[2] Report of the Royal Commission, Questions 10843 and 13134.

by the artillery of the 7th Division, swept the enemy's positions with a slow fire of shrapnel and lyddite. The principal result of this was the destruction of the greater part of the enemy's artillery ammunition.

By the greater part of the army the day was spent in collecting the various units and assigning to them their positions in the line of the investment. The West Riding Regiment, after its fortunate withdrawal of the morning, occupied the ridge facing the laager; the rest of the space between it and Signal Hill being filled by the Highland Brigade. The Welsh[1] and Essex Regiments, portions of which had spent the night in digging trenches in the sandy banks of the river, remained in position, the 5th and 6th Mounted Infantry covering their rear to the eastward. The remaining two companies of the Welsh Regiment, under Captain Morland, retired on the divisional headquarters at 6 a.m. The 4th Mounted Infantry, only sixty strong, recrossed the river and marched to Paardeberg Drift, being shelled, as they retired, from the ridges east of Kitchener's Kop. On the right bank, Smith-Dorrien's Brigade formed a semicircle three miles long at a distance of 2,600 yards from the enemy's laager, his left joining hands with the Household Cavalry at Roberts's Hill, his right resting on the river. Gordon's Brigade, which had bivouacked north of Koedoesrand Drift on the preceding evening, reached Kameelfontein at 9 a.m., and so enabled the 10th Hussars and 12th Lancers to evacuate their position and repair for forage and food to Paardeberg Drift.

Only in the neighbourhood of Kitchener's Kop did any event of importance take place. Throughout the night of the 18th–19th the Buffs and Gloucesters, in their shelter trenches opposite the hill, had covered the right flank of the 6th Division, being themselves perpetually sniped although without loss. During the morning the last-named regiment, supported by the fire of two companies of the Buffs, gained a position within 1,400 yards of the lower slopes. The firing, which had been sharp on both sides, now slackened, and the companies of the Buffs, which had had scarcely any water and no food except their emergency rations for over forty hours, were withdrawn to the ridge facing the laager. At 2.30 p.m. the Gloucester Regiment was ordered to advance and seize

[1] Five companies.

Kitchener's Kop itself, which it was supposed that the enemy had evacuated. The movement was supported by the Yorkshire Regiment on the right and the Oxfordshire Light Infantry on the left, and covered by the fire of the 76th Battery. The Gloucester companies at once drew a sharp fire; but protected by ant-hills they managed by dusk to get within 800 yards of the spurs of the main hill. But the lateness of the hour and the heaviness of the fire had convinced Lord Roberts that the position could be cleared at less cost by a turning movement of the mounted troops, and orders were issued forbidding an assault. The supporting battalions fell back, but the order did not reach the Gloucester Regiment, which continued to advance; and with some loss including that of Colonel Lindsell who was shot through the lung, cleared and occupied the kopjes below the main hill. Here, however, want of men and ammunition necessitated a halt; the precarious position of the battalion was reported to Head-quarters, and during the night it was withdrawn to its former position, having lost two officers and twenty-four men killed and wounded.

Meanwhile, on the right rear of the Gloucesters Martyr, with the 2nd and 8th Mounted Infantry, had been sent to clear some low kopjes,[1] from which a part of De Wet's force directly threatened the rear of the 6th Division, and covered the south-western approaches to Kitchener's Kop itself. The enemy opened a heavy fire with rifle and pom-pom, before which Martyr fell back; and in the afternoon the 10th Hussars and the 12th Lancers, with G Battery, were pushed up to his assistance. A turning movement to the south forced the Boers to evacuate their positions, which were at once occupied by the 8th Mounted Infantry; and a reconnaissance pushed round the south side of Kitchener's Kopje drew a long-range shell-fire from De Wet's guns. Broadwood decided that the position was too strong to attack, and after an exhausting march, which severely tried the sinking strength of the horses, he returned to Paardeberg Drift, where he bivouacked. The Mounted Infantry remained behind to hold the positions gained.

Late in the afternoon the 14th Brigade staggered into camp, after a march which had taxed its endurance to the utmost. In twenty hours

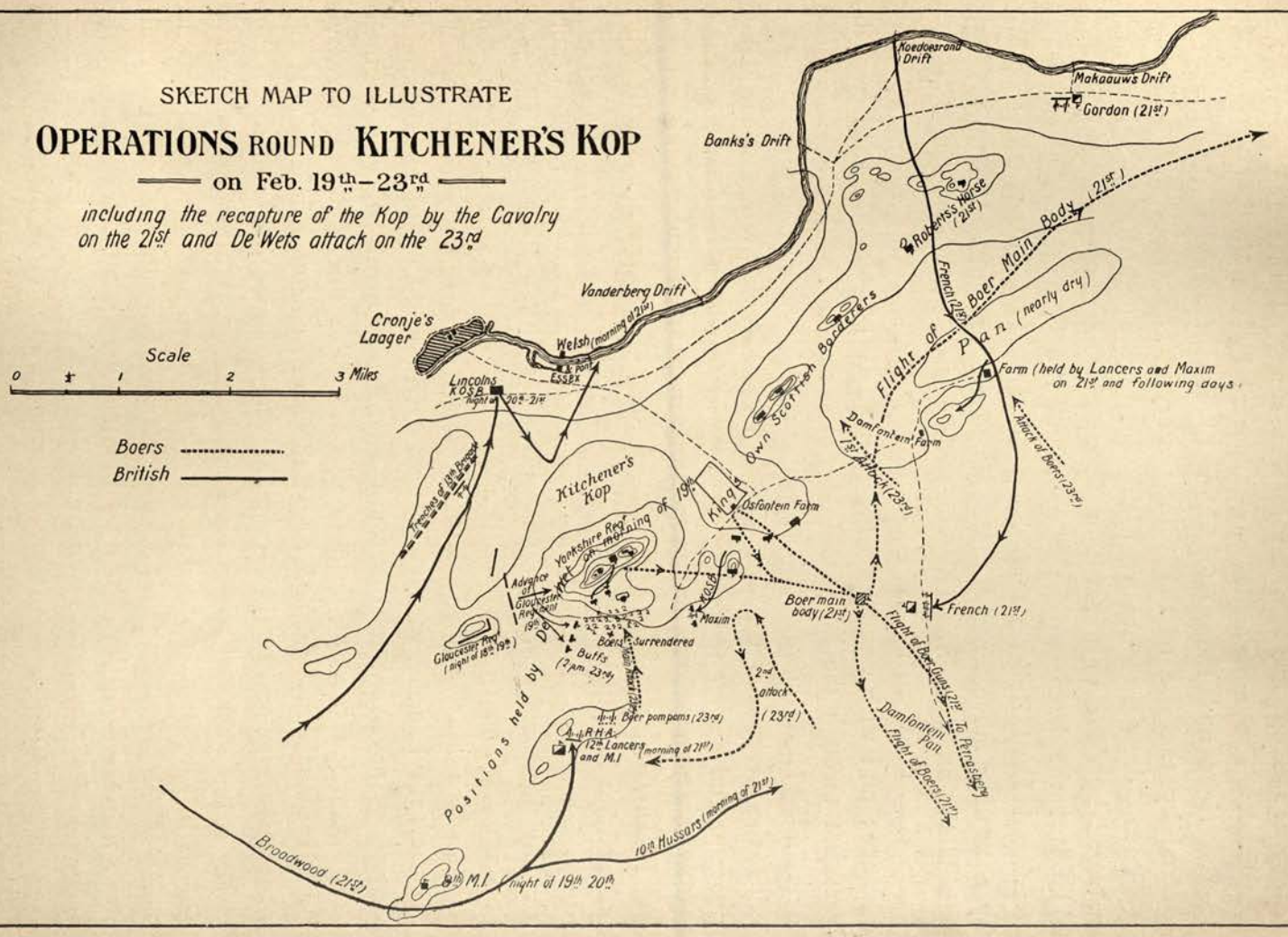
[1] See map illustrating operations round Kitchener's Kop, p. 436.

SKETCH MAP TO ILLUSTRATE

OPERATIONS ROUND KITCHENER'S KOP

on Feb. 19th–23rd

including the recapture of the Kop by the Cavalry on the 21st and De Wets attack on the 23rd



it had covered thirty-four miles. Three biscuits, and in some cases a meat ration, was all the food obtainable, and the men had been on their legs nearly the whole of the time. The roads had been ruined by the constant passage of the Free State convoys from Jacobsdal, and during the march of the preceding night had been constantly blocked by baggage. The last part of the distance had been covered in fighting formation. Towards the end of the day it became more and more difficult to rouse the men after a halt, and as they drew near Paardeberg they seemed to an eye-witness "like old men, with their chins hanging over their chests." Nevertheless, hardly a man fell out, and at 5 p.m. the fainting battalions came in sight of the laager and halted behind the 6th Division. The emergency rations were opened, and the men lay down on the veldt, to pass a sleepless night without great coats or blankets in the bitter cold.

Equally arduous was the march of the Naval Brigade, which halted five miles west of Paardeberg Drift after a journey of twenty-seven miles over roads deep in sand and smothered in dust. So slowly at last did the weary oxen pull that the bivouac was not reached until eight o'clock in the evening.

Another night passed without movement on Cronje's part, and Lord Roberts, his reinforcements now within reach, began to draw the lines of his investment closer. In the dusk of the preceding evening the Shropshire Light Infantry had made a bold and skilful advance against the river-bed, and occupied it to the east of the great donga, which was found unoccupied. The retirement of the enemy had been reported by Captain Stewart, of the Black Watch, on the morning of the 19th, but the Shropshire Light Infantry do not seem to have been aware of this when they advanced. Moving again before dawn on the 20th, they made a fine rush along the bank, and began to entrench within about 800 yards of the enemy's positions. The Boers had now abandoned the whole of the great bend which they had held so stubbornly on the 18th; and the infantry were within medium rifle range of the interior of the laager.

On the other flank, in accordance with the plan sanctioned by Lord Roberts on the afternoon of the 19th, General French sent Gordon's

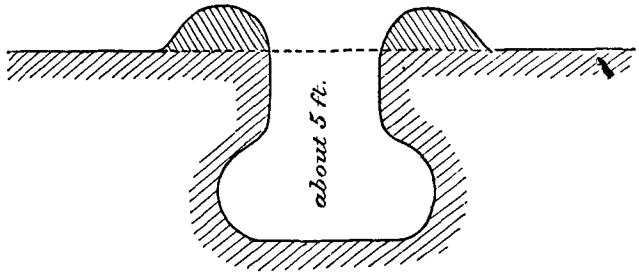
Brigade to seize the eastern drifts; R Battery and the 16th Lancers advancing on Makaauw's, and 150 of Roberts's Horse [1] on Koedoesrand. Both were successfully occupied, and the hills immediately to the south were shelled and cleared of the enemy, who gave way when their right was threatened from Makaauw's. Roberts's Horse occupied the abandoned ridges, and French moved his headquarters to Koedoesrand, thus blocking the line of a Boer retreat to the east, and placing himself in a position from which he could act against the flank and rear of the enemy on Kitchener's Kop. The outpost line east and west of Kameelfontein was handed over to the 6th Mounted Infantry.

On the same day, presumably to test the enemy's power of resistance, and if possible to narrow the ring of investment, a reconnaissance in force took place on both banks of the river. While some of the infantry of the 13th Brigade threatened the southern face of the Boer position, the whole of the 19th Brigade, with the exception of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry which was engaged in holding an outer ring of kopjes north of Paardeberg, advanced towards the laager, the Shropshire Light Infantry along the river-bank, the Canadians in front of Gun Hill, the Gordon Highlanders on the left, their outer flank again being covered by De Lisle's Mounted Infantry. The movement began at 6 a.m. The Shropshires got within about 500 yards of the enemy's trenches when a heavy fire obliged them to halt. The Canadians, moving in very open formation, were within 1,000 yards of Cronje's main position, when their cook-waggon and water-cart drew the fire of a pom-pom, which wounded four men in the reserve companies. On the left the Gordons actually got within 600 yards of the laager without drawing a single shot, the Boers evidently reserving their fire for an expected charge; but with the opening of the pom-pom from the Red House [2] rifle fire became general, and the battalion lay down in single rank and began to reply. For some hours the Mausers spluttered from the river-bank, but no harm was done, and about 5 p.m. the battalions fell back out of range, and gradually withdrew to Gun Hill. The Gordons, who did not suffer any casualties, left a thin cordon behind to prevent any attempts to break out. The Shropshire Light Infantry,

[1] Roberts's Horse had arrived with Gordon on the 19th. [2] Cronje's headquarters.

who retired at the same hour to a position about 1,200 yards below the laager, had two men wounded. Slight as the fighting had been, the intense heat and the long period of exposure had greatly exhausted the infantry. As already remarked, it was on this day that Lord Roberts definitely abandoned the project of a renewed attack.

In the meantime the Naval Brigade had come up. Three 4·7 guns and one 12-pounder crossed the river[1] and opened fire at 4.30 p.m. from Gun Hill, the remaining 4·7 and 12-pounders coming into action on the ridge (D), 1,300 yards from the left bank. Four field batteries also took part in this desultory[2] bombardment. Firing went on for the remainder of the day, the enemy offering no living target except when a few Boers appeared working at their trenches in the open plain



SECTION OF BOER TRENCH.

north of the river. As these were careful to keep close to their rifle-pits and shelters, and were generally able to get under cover before the shells arrived, it is extremely unlikely that any loss was inflicted.

While the fire slowly dwindled to the westwards the 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers and the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment of Chermside's Brigade,[3] which had spent the day in bivouac recovering from its fatigues, received orders to relieve the Welsh and Essex Regiments in the river-bed east of the laager. These two battalions had now for three days been constantly engaged with the enemy; for, in addition to

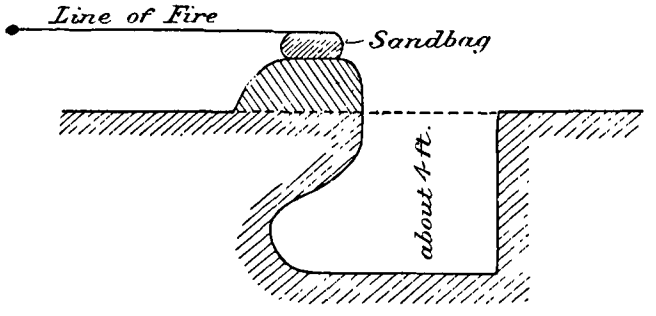
[1] Pontoons were badly needed at Paardeberg. The loss of the transport at Waterval had prevented their being brought up.

[2] The guns of Gun Hill only fired thirty-seven rounds.

[3] The German Staff History states that these movements took place on the night of the 19th–20th. We have been unable to reconcile this account with other evidence.

the heavy fighting on the 18th, sniping along the river-bed had been constant and harassing. The hardships of their position were heightened by their separation from the rest of the division, and by the difficulty of bringing food across the open space of ground between Kitchener's Kop and the river. Early on the 19th a detachment of the Army Service Corps had been driven back with the loss of ten men; and between that day and the 21st only one waggon of supplies had reached them. It was therefore highly desirable that as soon as they were available fresh troops should take their places.

At 6 p.m. Chermside's battalions, accompanied by three sections of the 9th Company of Royal Engineers, left their bivouac, and, moving along the rear of the line held by the 6th Division, headed



SECTION OF BOER TRENCH.

north-eastwards. The march was slow, and it was close on 10 p.m. before the head of the column saw lights in front and found itself approaching the river-bed. Half a company of the Lincolnshire Regiment went forward to reconnoitre while the rest of the force halted. The advanced party had not proceeded far when they were fired on, and the officer in command discovered that he had stumbled full upon the Boer outposts in front of the laager. A few of his men lay down, and were afterwards taken prisoners by the enemy; the rest retired with their commander, who reported to the brigadier. But General Chermside, not realising that he had diverged too much to the left, seems to have thought that the shots had proceeded from the British picquets, and ordered his column to bivouac. Dawn showed that he was within a few hundred yards of the laager, and a heavy fire

from gun and rifle was poured upon the Lincolnshire Regiment, the Engineers, and the transport. The King's Own Scottish Borderers had fortunately withdrawn an hour earlier, and, acting on orders previously received, were approaching the position held by the Welsh and Essex Regiments when the enemy opened fire. Seeing the plight of the Lincolnshire Regiment, the Borderers endeavoured to keep down the Boer fire with a Maxim; but before this could be effected the exposed troops had already suffered some loss and were retiring towards Kitchener's Kop. A fresh complication now arose, for some British infantry, seeing waggons galloping from the laager towards the hill, concluded that Cronje was trying to escape and fired several long range volleys before they discovered their mistake; while De Wet's men on the Kop also opened fire on the unlucky battalion, causing it to retire westwards towards the headquarters of the 6th Division.

At this moment Lord Roberts rode up and directed every gun within range to shell the hill, but the order had scarcely been given when help arrived from another quarter. Before dawn French had set out to attack Kitchener's Kop from the south and east and had crossed the river at Koedoesrand with 268 men of the Household Cavalry[1] and 9th Lancers, and a part of Roberts's Horse, together with R and P Batteries of the Horse Artillery. The 16th Lancers, with O Battery, 150 of Roberts's Horse, and one squadron of Kitchener's Horse, was left to hold the drifts and ridges won on the preceding day. Broadwood, with the Carabineers, 10th Hussars and 12th Lancers, G Battery, and the 4th and 8th Mounted Infantry, was ordered to march from Paardeberg Drift and close in on Kitchener's Kop from the south and south-west; while the Yorkshire Regiment, the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, the Gloucestershire Regiment, and the Naval guns demonstrated against it from the west.

French first moved southwards. After proceeding two miles the squadron of the 2nd Life Guards, which formed the advance guard, came under a heavy fire from the ridge west of Damfontein Farm, and the force was obliged to halt while the guns cleared it with shrapnel. The enemy now fell back on the hills east of Kitchener's Kop:

[1] The two Life Guards squadrons.

and the cavalry staff were in the act of ascending the abandoned kopje when word came back from the left advanced squadron that the Boers were trying to remove their guns. On reaching the crest a small body of horsemen, accompanied by several vehicles, was seen galloping furiously in the direction of Petrusburg. The horse artillery at once came into action, and their first shell burst so near the retreating enemy that a mule swerved and broke the pole of one of their waggons; but an attempt of the 2nd Life Guards to capture the rest failed owing to the exhaustion of the horses. As the squadron returned to join the main body, which was now moving eastward, a mass of Boers, 500 or 600 strong, suddenly appeared from the direction of Kitchener's Kop and poured a heavy fire into the Cavalry at about 800 yards range. For a moment there was some confusion, but the troopers dismounted and returned the fire, while the guns, some 400 yards behind, shelled the enemy hotly. Breaking up under the rush of shrapnel the Boers wheeled right and left, most of them riding off between French and the river, the rest hurrying south-eastwards in the direction taken by their guns.

The attack on the Kop had succeeded with startling rapidity. Early in the morning Broadwood had reached a position three miles to the south, and had come under the fire of a pom-pom, which he had silenced with the guns of G Battery. Then with the view of deceiving the enemy as to his dispositions he sent the 10th Hussars in pursuit with orders to show themselves on all rising ground, and wheeling his guns and the 12th Lancers to the northward, suddenly opened fire upon Kitchener's Kop at a range of 2,400 yards. In a moment, at the very time when the Lincolns were suffering from the cross-fire in the flat beyond, the enemy streamed down the hills and ran for their horses. In wild haste they galloped eastwards, the principal body, it would seem, colliding with French, and causing the brief skirmish the course of which we have already recounted. The rest in scattered groups followed in the trail of their flying comrades, their retreat accelerated by the shells of the battery, by the fire of Roberts's Horse south of Koedoesrand, and by that of a squadron of the 9th Lancers and a Maxim left at Damfontein Farm. Still further on O Battery opened

fire on them from Makaauw's; and the Horse Guards squadron and some of Kitchener's Horse gave chase. But the meshes of the net were too wide, and nearly the whole of the enemy escaped, including amongst their number De Wet, who here experienced the first of his narrow escapes. Had the Cavalry brigades been up to their full strength and their horses in condition the British army might have been saved many a laborious trek and a long monotony of disappointment.

Meanwhile the Lincolnshire Regiment advanced on Kitchener's Kop, which they occupied without difficulty, capturing forty-eight Boers who had not dared to run the gauntlet of the Cavalry. Their losses, all suffered during the hurried retirement of the morning, were two officers wounded, one man killed and fifteen wounded. The Engineers had seven casualties, the Cavalry the same number, including Colonel Calley, who was injured by a falling horse. The enemy's loss in killed and wounded probably amounted to about forty.[1]

The recapture of Kitchener's Kop and the occupation of all the Boer positions held by the Boer relieving forces south of the river marks the turning point of the investment. From this moment Cronje's position, which had before been desperate, became hopeless, and the situation of the British army was proportionately improved. New dispositions were made at once. The Yorkshire Regiment took over the Kop from the Lincolns, who went to their appointed position in the river-bed. The Essex and the Welsh Regiment prolonged the outer ring to the westwards, the right of the Welsh touching the left of the Black Watch, whose right again rested on Paardeberg Drift and was in close connection with the outer posts of the 19th Brigade to the north of the river. Osfontein Farm and the hills to the north-east were occupied by the King's Own Scottish Borderers, the left of that battalion joining hands with the posts held by Roberts's Horse south of Koedoesrand. Opposite the

[1] De Wet says that his loss was one killed, one wounded, and fourteen prisoners, including Field Cornet Spellers. These figures, if accurate, can only refer to the 300 men under his immediate command. As is usual with him, the Boer general only gives the numbers of the detachment immediately under his own command. There must have been at least 1,000 Boers in the vicinity; English accounts estimate them at 2,000 or 3,000. (*Three Years' War*, p. 6.)

laager the Buffs, Oxfordshire Light Infantry, and Gloucestershire Regiment held in turn a line of shelter trenches covering the artillery positions. The 2nd Hampshire Regiment,[1] which on the evening of the 20th had been sent to hold a position in the neighbourhood of Brandvallei Drift, was recalled on the evening of the 21st, and marching to the south-east of the laager joined the 2nd Norfolk Regiment, the remaining battalion of the 14th Brigade, between the river and Kitchener's Kop. Here the two battalions lay down in open order ready to check any effort that the enemy might make to escape. Shortly before dawn they received fresh orders and marched to the river; the Hampshire Regiment crossing at Vanderberg's Drift and occupying the position hitherto held by the Welsh, the Norfolks relieving the Essex. The Lincolns were with General Tucker's head-quarters in rear of the Norfolks. Both the advanced battalions began entrenching.

Thus, by dawn on the 22nd, the British army lay in two complete rings round Cronje, the outer ring ready to meet all attempts to extricate him, the inner working steadily closer from either flank on both banks of the Modder. So successful had been the operations of the 21st that the orders of the 18th directing the movement of the 15th Brigade, the howitzers, and Colonel Flint's Brigade Division of Field Artillery to Klip Kraal Drift were cancelled, and these troops left for the moment at Jacobsdal. The same night Porter, whose belated arrival had seriously hampered French in his operations against Kitchener's Kop and had compelled him, in order to effect his object, to run the risk of temporarily denuding the north bank, reached Kameelfontein, bringing with him six squadrons of Cavalry,[2] the New Zealanders, Queenslanders, the 1st and 3rd Mounted Infantry, and Colonel Rochfort's Brigade Division of Artillery.[3] For the delay the commander of the

[1] 14th Brigade.

[2] Viz., the Scots Greys, one squadron of Carabineers, one of New South Wales Lancers, and one of the Inniskillings.

[3] Porter's horses had benefited little by their stay at Kimberley, owing to want of forage and grain. Rochfort's batteries were also badly off. Although they had drawn thirty-eight horses from their ammunition column when they left it behind at Klip Drift, they were obliged to leave three ammunition waggons and one store waggon per battery at

1st Brigade was in no way responsible. He had heard nothing of the order of the 19th until midday on the 20th, when Lord Methuen reached Kimberley; and he was prevented from moving until the following morning by want of supplies.

The result of French's operation was not likely to be underestimated by the leaders of the relieving commandos, and at a council held on the 22nd it was resolved to recapture Kitchener's Kop without delay. De Wet's force, according to his own account, now numbered 1,600 men, having been reinforced by detachments from the Winburg and Senekal commandos which had come up from Bloemfontein under Thewnissen Vilonel and Andreas Cronje. It was decided that the British positions south of the river should be attacked at three different points, De Wet on the right assaulting the hills west of Damfontein, Froneman the ridges north-east of Osfontein, and Thewnissen and Philip Botha Kitchener's Kop. On the same day a large number of Boers, whether specially sent to draw away our troops in a false direction or belonging to a different force, threatened De Lisle at Kameelfontein, and the 1st Cavalry Brigade, with detachments from the 2nd, went north to support him. But by the time they arrived the enemy had disappeared, and the cavalry returned to Koedoesrand. If a feint had really been intended it failed altogether. Not a man was permanently withdrawn from the southern bank; in fact, the outer ring in this quarter was reinforced, three companies of the Lincolnshire Regiment taking up a position on the left of the King's Own Scottish Borderers.

At dawn on the 23rd the Boers made their last effort to save Cronje.[1] Detachments of the enemy threatened the 9th Lancer squadron at Damfontein and occupied some ridges south of the farm, from which

Kimberley, and use the horses belonging to them to drag the guns, taking with them to Koedoesrand only three ammunition waggons apiece. The supply of gun ammunition during the investment seems to have been a matter of difficulty, for on the 20th Lord Roberts issued an order directing that when within sight of headquarters brigade divisions and batteries were not to be tactically employed without order from the Chief of the Staff, except in cases of emergency; and no one below the rank of battery commander was empowered to regulate the expenditure of ammunition. Want of it may possibly account for the fitful character of the bombardment.

[1] See map of Operations round Kitchener's Kop, p. 437.

they were driven later by Porter with two squadrons of the Greys and Carabineers and U Battery. Another body of Boers attacked the left outposts of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, but were easily driven away. Returning to the attack they advanced against Osfontein, where were stationed five companies of the Borderers. Once again they recoiled from the fire of the defenders, and retired with loss to the low kopjes south of Kitchener's Kop, which two days before had covered the march of Broadwood.

At this moment the alarm was sounded on the Kop itself, and a party of the Yorkshire Regiment occupying the knoll at its southern foot was driven in by a strong body of the enemy, which had advanced through the bush that fringed its base. The four companies picquetted on the slope of the hill at once opened fire, and the three companies in reserve behind the crest moved out to reinforce them. For about two hours a hot fire was maintained on both sides, but the Yorkshiremen held good positions and the enemy never attempted to advance. Reinforcements were now set in motion on either flank. Five companies of the Buffs[1] advanced against the enemy's left and rear, and the King's Own Scottish Borderers brought a Maxim into action against their right sweeping the open plain behind the scrub. Supported on either flank by a battery of artillery the infantry pressed steadily forward; and at 8 a.m. the converging fire on the scrub had grown so heavy that 200 of the enemy abandoned it and fled across the plain to the shelter of the kopjes behind under a fire that brought many men and horses to the ground. Still a residue held on to the scrub below the southern knoll, and when at 11 a.m. Major Fearon, thinking that they had gone, led a detachment down to reoccupy it, the enemy opened a sharp fire which was supported by that of two pom-poms stationed on the further ridges. Two companies were now called up and the scrub was attacked; but the enemy still fought stubbornly; and three officers, Captain Pearson and Lieutenants Gunthorpe and Wardle, and fifteen men were wounded and nine men killed before, hemmed in on three sides and with nearly all his horses shot, Commandant Thewnissen and ninety burghers surrendered to the advancing

[1] The other two were holding the ridge opposite the laager.

companies of the Buffs. The enemy's losses, apart from prisoners,[1] were considerable. The King's Own Scottish Borderers actually buried ten bodies; and a German ambulance which arrived next day stated that sixty or seventy more had been wounded. Our own casualties amounted to forty, including five officers wounded.

The fight on February 23rd was the last important event that took place on the outer ring of the investment. From that moment the enemy gave up all hope of regaining the positions they had lost and contented themselves with hovering round our lines, causing constant alarms and necessitating frequent movements of the mounted troops, but never venturing to attack in earnest. The only disadvantage they inflicted were the increased efforts that these alarms entailed upon the exhausted horses of the Cavalry, who were liable to be summoned from Koedoesrand to meet an attack on any part of a perimeter twenty-four miles long. The weather, too, became persistently bad, incessant deluges of rain reducing the bivouacs to swamps, wetting the men to the skin and rendering the drifts impassable. These hardships, added to constant work and reduced rations, rendered the closing days of the investment miserable enough, but never for one moment seem to have daunted the indomitable cheerfulness of the British soldier.

But though the army responded with unabated willingness to every call he made on it, the period of the investment must have been an anxious one for the British Commander. The difficulties of supply remained almost as great as ever. In spite of the utmost efforts of the commissariat departments the army was still insufficiently fed. The losses at Waterval could not be made good at once, and the troops, who ever since the 16th had marched and fought on half-rations, were now living mainly on trek-ox beef, of which the captures of animals near the laager afforded a good supply, and one and a half biscuits a day. Had it not been for the beef, which was extremely tough and unpalatable and, in the almost total absence of firewood, very difficult to cook, they would have been on the verge of starvation. It was vain to order

[1] Some of these prisoners had come from Natal, and were armed with Lee-Metfords captured from the 1st Battalion Gloucester Regiment at Nicholson's Nek.

that the local resources should be utilised. The contents of the few farms in the neighbourhood would scarcely have sufficed for the needs of a battalion for a single day. A few sheep and mealies were the principal items that the country afforded, and these meagre additions cannot be said to have sensibly mitigated the prevailing want.

A matter as urgent as the want of food was the absence of forage. The week of fatigues and privations, which ended in the interception of Cronje, had to a great degree demobilised the Cavalry Division. By the morning of the 19th, out of the 5,000 and odd horses which had marched under French's command from the banks of the Modder and the Riet about a third had fallen out of the ranks. Of these, 558 had died and 1,166 been left behind. The survivors had been worked almost to a standstill. Abundance of suitable food would alone have restored them to condition; but from the time of their arrival at Paardeberg to the end of the investment they had often to exist on less than quarter rations. Between the 17th and 19th most squadrons received 1½ lbs. of corn per diem, about one-eighth of the proper amount;[1] on the 20th a part of the division received 8 lbs.; from that day onwards the ration often fell as low as 3 lbs. and less, and was not again raised to 8 lbs. till the 26th, when a large convoy of 100 waggons, containing 120,000 rations and two days' forage arrived from Kimberley.[2] But this supply was too small, and had arrived too late to restore the horses. The fortnight of labour and starvation had ruined them. In view of the inefficiency of the Cavalry during the remainder of the march on Bloemfontein this fact must be carefully borne in mind. To cavalry leaders, accustomed to rely on the speed and endurance of their horses as their chief weapon, the knowledge that these qualities no longer existed imparted a sense of impotence more paralysing than the uncertainties of a tactical situation.[3]

[1] The horses of the Mounted Infantry got none at all.

[2] The convoy seems to have been principally made up of the 78 waggons discovered by Chester Master on the 16th, reinforced by the local resources of the town. Where oxen were not procurable, mule draught had had to be employed; and deficiencies in harness had been made up from stores in Kimberley, some of that purchased being silver-mounted and of the kind used in private carriages.

[3] A summary of the horse-state of the 12th Lancers on February 24th, a regiment

It is at present impossible to trace exactly the causes of the shortage of food at Paardeberg. The amount of supplies carried by the army at the commencement of the operations had, of course, been strictly conditioned by the available amount of transport. This had prevented Lord Roberts from taking with him more than twelve days' food and four days' forage;[1] the latter item being reckoned not at the regulation ration of 12 lbs. grain, but at 8 lbs. per horse. Even these quantities could only be carried at the cost of reducing the medical transport from ten ambulances to two per bearer company, and halving the forage waggons attached to the field hospitals. The loss of the convoy at Waterval, which contained, according to Lord Roberts, three days' food, according to others, five, added to the consumption of the preceding days, had obliged him, for fear of further loss or unforeseen delays, to reduce the rations from February 16th onwards. So far all is clear, but it is not quite so easy to understand why the shortage lasted as long as it did.[2] By the morning of the 19th 100 laden

which had had nearly three months in which to acclimatise its horses, and enjoyed the further advantage of possessing in Lord Airlie one of the most careful and capable horse masters in the service, may be of interest in this connection. On February 11th it marched with 355 horses; having left 105 at Maitland, Naauwpoort, Orange River, and Modder; approximately two-thirds of this number at the last-named place, where the regiment had undergone hard and constant work for over two months. Of the 355, nineteen were left behind as unfit at Klip Drift, twenty-five at Kimberley, twenty-seven at Paardeberg, sixty-one were dead, and twenty-one missing. If we allot a third of the dead and missing to the period before February 11th we find that 35½ per cent. of the original horses were lost in the first fortnight of Lord Roberts's campaign. The 12th Lancers had done its fair share of work in the operations of General French, but certainly not as much as the regiments of Gordon's Brigade, which could probably show a still higher percentage of losses.

[1] Hospital Commission. Lord Roberts's evidence (12679). Before the War Commission (10843) he gave the amount as ten days' bread and a month's groceries.

[2] The introduction of the departmental system of transport did not affect the main question of supply at Paardeberg. The defects of this system were mainly apparent when the force was in rapid movement; and even during the advance from the Modder, and the pursuit of Cronje, the determination and energy of the transport officers did much to overcome its inconveniences. It has been stated by Sir Redvers Buller (Minutes of Evidence, Vol. II., p. 218), that the supply column of the Cavalry Division, which had retained the regimental system, saved the situation after the disaster at Waterval. We have been unable to discover any foundation for this view. Not only did the Cavalry leave their supply columns behind at Klip Drift before De Wet attacked the convoy, before, that is,

waggons from the Modder, carrying presumably two days' supplies, reached Paardeberg; and the 78 Boers' waggons captured on the 16th were, to quote the Commander-in-Chief, "filled with all kinds of supplies." The contents of these 178 waggons, it might be expected, would have tided over the critical days. The loss at Waterval only accounted for two-fifths[1] of the ox-waggons which formed the supply park of the army. There still remain, after deducting the lost transport, 295 waggons, carrying, say, five days' supplies, to be accounted for. We can find no trace of their having reached the army between the 19th and the 26th. If they did, the supplies they carried do not appear to have reached the troops. If they did not, what was the cause of the delay? The available evidence does not allow us to answer these questions; and the fact remains that up till the end of February, and even after, the supplies were still inadequate. The most probable explanation seems to be this. Lord Roberts left Modder River with transport carrying ten to twelve days' supply. He calculated on being able to send the waggons back to the railway to replenish, using them to transport the wounded, as was actually done. The double journey from Paardeberg to Modder and back probably took six days, allowing for loading and unloading. Had he possessed, when he arrived at Paardeberg, transport for ten to twelve days, he would have been able to reckon (roughly) on always having four to six days' supply in hand. There were millions of rations on the railway, if only they could be brought up. But the loss at Waterval had reduced his transport to a carrying power of only about seven to nine days' supply, which, allowing for the journey to and fro, left little or no margin with which to meet unforeseen contingencies. The necessary surplus on the full ration basis having disappeared, he had to form one by reducing the daily ration; nor was it possible to return to a higher scale until the carrying power of the transport had been fully re-established. If we add to these

the disaster can have become known to General French; but inquiry also shows that the mule companies of the 6th Division, the only unit which could have benefited by the Cavalry supply waggons, accompanied it throughout the operations up to Bloemfontein, and issued rations nightly to all the troops which formed part of it. We can discover no instance of the 6th Division having made use of the Cavalry supply column.

[1] That is, 180 out of 475 waggons.

considerations the delays caused by bad roads and the daily wear and tear of transport, animals and material, the shortage at Paardeberg seems to be fairly explained. From the first the transport was barely adequate; the loss at Waterval deprived it of whatever margin it may originally have possessed. As a consequence the food and forage it was able to bring had to be doled out with a very sparing hand.

Quite as important as the problem of supply was the delay which Cronje's dogged resistance imposed upon the execution of Lord Roberts's plan of campaign. Had Lord Kitchener's policy of attack succeeded no Boers would have been up in time to contest Poplar Grove and Driefontein, and the losses and delay of those actions would have been avoided. The army would not have suffered the constant hardships of the investment, the outbreak of enteric might have been greatly mitigated, and Bloemfontein would probably have been reached by the end of February. The gain of a fortnight would have greatly increased the difficulties of the Boers south of the Orange River and would have left the British mounted troops in better condition to intercept their retreat. Moreover, the prolonged halt at Paardeberg and Osfontein did the animals more harm than good. Their fatigues were nearly as great as those they would have undergone during an advance; and the supplies remaining scanty and irregular the horses went from bad to worse, and were less fit for hard work on the 7th of March than on the 21st of February. In every sense the delay at Paardeberg was most unfortunate.

That this was felt by Lord Roberts is proved by the fact that during the middle days of the investment he seems seriously to have contemplated sending the Cavalry on to Bloemfontein alone. The object of such an operation would clearly have been to seize the capital before the enemy could return to defend it; though even if the Cavalry had succeeded it is a question whether they would have been numerically strong enough to have done more than hold it. But before the project could be put in hand it was too late. What on the 20th or 21st might have been possible was impracticable on the 24th.[1] By that time considerable numbers of Boers were massing on the Bloemfontein

[1] A state of men and horses fit to march was made up on February 24th.

roads, and the Cavalry was too weak to attack them. Less costly in men as the "spade" policy proved at the time, it is probable that a second and better directed attack would have been cheapest in the long run—cheapest because it would have ensured increased efficiency to the army, avoided further delay and loss on the way to Bloemfontein, and in gaining time would have inflicted heavier moral and material loss on the enemy. Lord Roberts was certainly placed in an embarrassing situation. To order a fresh attack on the laager would, we admit, have required at the moment when he reached Paardeberg an extremely strong conviction of its necessity, for the general feeling of the army, and probably of those around him, was against such an attempt. It was hardly likely that Lord Roberts, always inclined to the avoidance of loss, would have been possessed of such a conviction; for not only did he see with his own eyes the results of the attack of the previous day, but he recognised also the hopelessness of Cronje's position, and regarded his early surrender as inevitable. Unfortunately, he trusted too much to the will of his enemy; the fruit took longer to ripen than he had supposed; and the stubbornness of Cronje, whether at that time the Boer general realised its value to his cause or not, was to prepare fresh difficulties, delays, and losses for the conqueror.

Of the two means by which the Commander-in-Chief sought to force Cronje to a surrender the spade was certainly more effective than the gun. During the operations round Kitchener's Kop the trench work had been steadily continued. In the small hours of the 21st the Shropshire Light Infantry had advanced to within 550 yards of the nearest Boer trench; and a party of fifty men had been sent to entrench the southern bank, thus occupying the ground that the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had reached during the general action. No further advance was made until the 27th, but every night the trenches were deepened and lengthened, each battalion occupying them in turn for a shift of forty-eight hours. Thus, on the 22nd, the Gordon Highlanders took the place of the Shropshire Light Infantry, who, with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders,[1] garrisoned Gun Hill; the Canadians then occupying the

[1] This battalion crossed the river on the 22nd and joined Smith-Dorrien.

outer ring at Paardekop, and the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry resting at Paardeberg Drift. On the 24th the last-named battalion moved into the trenches, the Canadians to the Drift, the remaining battalions stayed near Gun Hill and at Paardekop. The gap between the 19th Brigade and De Lisle's position at Kameelfontein was filled by the 2nd Mounted Infantry. Further east the 4th Mounted Infantry connected De Lisle's and Porter's posts at Koedoesrand.

On the right or eastern flank the 14th Brigade were also pushing their trenches forward. By the night of the 23rd the Hampshire Regiment on the north bank was within 700 yards of the nearest Boer shelter and about 1,100 of the main trace of the laager. On the south bank the Norfolk Regiment, which had been much harassed by Boer snipers, occupied the dongas in which the Welsh Regiment had sheltered during the 18th. Early on the next morning the right attack was reinforced by the West Riding Regiment, which crossed by a pontoon[1] under a sharp sniping fire, and took ground on the right front of the Hampshire Regiment, with which it henceforward shared the work. On both flanks the labour, as in all such operations, was constant and dangerous. Rifle fire rarely ceased in the river-bed; but it was heaviest at night when most of the trenching was done and the clink of tools made the enemy apprehensive of an attack. Then the dark banks sparkled and the rest of the weary men behind the working parties was disturbed by the rattle of musketry. Every night new trenches were dug or old ones extended, the working parties being covered by thin lines of skirmishers. Every day the new works were deepened and improved. Thus by the night of the 26th the Infantry in the river-bed had approached within 600 yards of either side of the laager; and on the eastern flank the 14th Brigade, throwing out posts across the plain north of Kitchener's Kop, had almost joined hands with the Buffs, parties of which regiment nightly patrolled the gap between Chermside and the right of the 6th Division.[2]

[1] Stationed at the same point as the Boer "pont."

[2] This gap never seems to have been occupied by any considerable force. The Infantry battalions at Kitchener's Kop and Osfontein, and the patrols on the plain, together with the openness of the ground, were presumably regarded as sufficient safeguards.

While the Infantry were digging Lord Roberts endeavoured to hasten the enemy's surrender by a further bombardment. On the 22nd, the day before Kitchener's Kop was attacked for the last time, the combined Artillery opened the heavy fire on the river-bed which has so often been described in such exaggerated language. From Gun Hill and the southern ridge fifty guns[1] kept up a slow fire on the Boer positions from 8.30 a.m. in the morning until night. The Naval guns and howitzers were directed mainly upon the waggons, the field batteries upon the trenches and shelters along the river-bed. "There was no hurry, very little noise, and seldom did two big shells burst simultaneously."[2]

Hardly a Boer was visible, and very few were hit, but the effect of the fire delivered at extremely short range[3] was sensational enough upon any object above ground. The remaining animals were destroyed, the waggons burnt to cinders; and the whole extent of the laager afterwards bore dreadful witness to the power of modern artillery. Dead horses, oxen and sheep mangled in a ghastly manner, lay in hundreds on the ground, in places two or three deep; limbs and fragments hung from the branches of trees, where they had been caught when hurled into the air by the big shells. There was scarcely an undamaged waggon remaining, so effective had been our fire, and many were simply represented by a blackened and twisted heap of ironwork. The ground was strewn with scattered clothes, saddles, harness, and cooking utensils, and the whole ghastly evidence of destruction was so vivid that every one marvelled that the Boers had held out so long.[4]

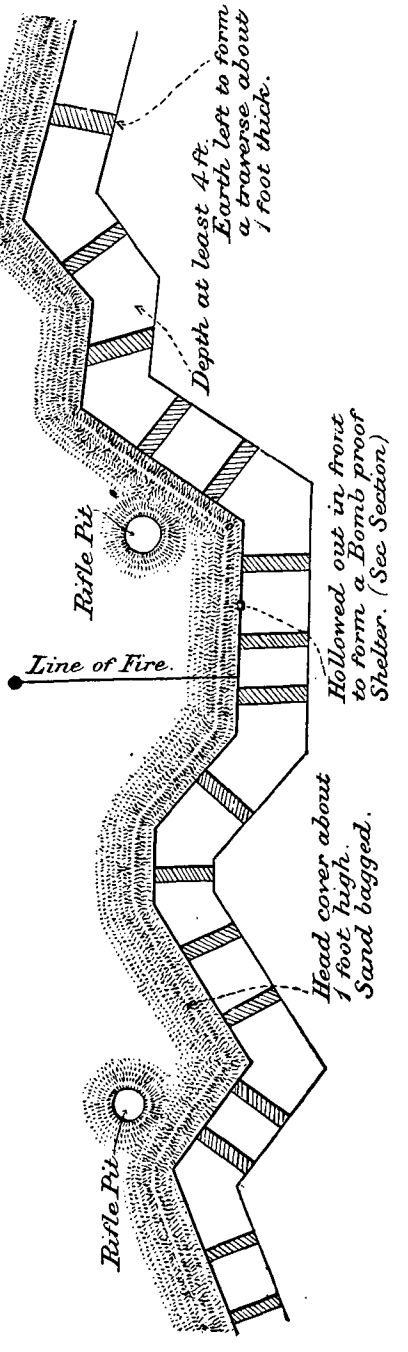
But the bombardment was the least of the evils that Cronje's followers had to endure. From the British fire, whether of gun or rifle, they took comparatively little hurt. Protected by their deep rifle-pits

[1] Four 4·7 Naval guns, two 12-pounders, six howitzers, and thirty-six field guns.

[2] "Naval Brigades in the South African War," p. 73. [3] 2,500 to 1,800 yards.

[4] "Naval Brigades in the South African War," p. 81. Probably the moral effect would have been much greater if no simultaneous bombardment had taken place, and if the different batteries had been allowed to fire a few rounds every twenty-four hours at uncertain intervals and at any target. The German Staff History refers to the small effects of the lyddite upon the enemy's trenches, and attributes it in part to the sandy nature of the soil.

and curving bottled-shaped trenches against enfilading fire or hidden in cavernous burrows in the banks of the river, they had little to fear from the shot of their enemy. The confined space into which the action of the 18th had compelled them to retire, the unsanitary condition of their crowded shelters and an atmosphere laden with a horrible stench of rotting carcases were more powerful motives to surrender. The water of the river was foul with dead animals. When on the 25th the flood carried a portion away, the Canadians were all day employed in poling off the carcases which were washed under the banks, and it was calculated that in twenty-four hours over 700[1] of these hideous forms were rolled down the fateful stream of the Modder, sowing wide the seeds of enteric amongst the unfortunate troops who had no source of water other than the pestilential stream. Food also had become a serious difficulty. The British artillery fire not only prevented anything being taken from the waggons by day, but destroyed a large part of what they contained—a small quantity from the first—for when Cronje



PLAN OF BOER TRENCH.

[1] Probably the total number was very much larger. Many bodies of animals, and perhaps even a few human bodies as well, appear to have been thrown into the stream as the only way of getting rid of them.

retreated much of the food in his camps had been left behind and the carts had been loaded with ammunition instead. Of rifle ammunition there was still plenty; but the smokeless powder for Albrecht's guns had been blown up on the 20th, and the artillerymen were unwilling to use the remaining black for fear that the heavy puff of smoke would give too good a mark for the powerful surrounding batteries.

The presence of the women and the total want of doctors and medicines further complicated the situation. On the 21st Lord Roberts, having learnt for the first time that a number of women were in the laager, had offered them free passage through his lines, and expressed his readiness to supply Cronje with medical aid and stores. But the Boer General refused the offer of the safe conduct and only accepted the other half of the proposal on condition that the British doctors should not leave his camp "until such time as he should shift it." This being refused, he suggested that a hospital should be erected 1,000 yards west of his laager, an arrangement which would have prevented the British trenches being pushed forward, and was impracticable on account of the limited medical equipment at Lord Roberts's disposal. Moreover, no mention was made of permission to leave the hospital, and the British General could not dispense with his medical staff, already insufficient, for a period limited only by the will of his opponent. All communication on the subject therefore ceased, and Cronje was left to battle with his fate alone.

His position was one that would have overwhelmed any man less iron-willed and ruthless than himself. Day by day it grew more hopeless and more unendurable, and the signs of mutiny became more evident. After the 23rd, when it was known that the attempts of the relieving forces had failed, his resolute will alone seems to have prevented his men from yielding. The bitter reproaches of his comrades he bore unmoved. None dared to convert them into action; and for a time the rising tide of rebellious despair was kept in check by a natural leader of men, relying not on an organised delegation of command or a tradition of military obedience, but on the ascendency of his single personality.

Surrounded on every side by affliction and dismay, the indomitable

Boer faced his hopeless lot with an unflinching demeanour, preferring to die rather than surrender to the enemy whom he had hated so bitterly and despised so long. The hardihood of most of his followers had long given way. A spirit of recklessness pervaded the camp; men ceased to obey orders, and spent their time in quarrelling. The old dislike of the Germans, which earlier success seemed to have dissipated, again became active. Albrecht was made the object of ungrateful accusations of disloyalty and incompetence; and he in his turn gave vent to his

MAJOR ALBRECHT.

contempt for the fighting powers of the Boers. Personal recrimination was only one symptom of the desperate nature of the situation. Dissension was rife between the Free Staters and Transvaalers, and when on the 26th the leaders of the former threatened to hoist the white flag in spite of their allies, Cronje saw himself obliged to yield. But he still pleaded for another night in order that any one who was willing to make the attempt might have a chance of escaping; and it was agreed to hold out until the morning of the 27th, the anniversary

of Majuba. By a strange irony of fate the date which the one nation had come to regard as one of the brightest and the other as the most disgraceful in their combined history was henceforth to be connected with the memory of the two most decisive British victories of the war.[1]

On the morning of the 26th General Colvile, going forward to observe the progress of the trench on the northern bank, found that its left extremity was clear of a thick belt of scrub in which the men had for some days been working, and that to carry it any further in a north-easterly or easterly direction would either bring it outside the front of the laager or expose the troops in it to enfilade from the trenches along the river-bed. He made up his mind that the time had come for another direct advance along the bank, an opinion which General Wood, Lord Roberts's chief engineer officer, confirmed. The sanction of the Field-Marshal having been obtained, the commander of the 9th Division resolved to push on that very evening and endeavour to seize a position from which he could overwhelm the trench directly facing him and render untenable the works behind it, which ran parallel to the river and were therefore liable to enfilade.

It was the turn of the Canadians to occupy the trenches, and to them was allotted the task of assault. By ten o'clock in the evening six of their companies, numbering 500 officers and men, were in the advanced trench, with 30 of the 7th Company of the Royal Engineers, under Lieut.-Colonel Kincaird, on the extreme right, 25 yards from the river. Another company occupied the trench on the south bank; the eighth and a part of the Gordon Highlanders were in reserve 300 yards in rear. The north-easterly continuation of the advanced trench on the left and left front of the Canadians was held by 200 of the Highlanders, and 1,500 yards to the left rear were extended the Shropshire Light Infantry, having on their left two companies of the Black Watch. The advance of the Canadians was to begin at 2 a.m. on the morning of the 27th, the battalion to be formed in two lines ten paces apart, the front rank with bayonets fixed and magazines charged, the rear with rifles slung carrying entrenching tools. The whole was to push forward without firing, and not till the

[1] The other was of course Pieter's Hill.

enemy's fire rendered further progress impossible was the front rank to reply. Covered by it, the men of the rear rank, aligned on the Engineers in the scrub and trees of the river bank, were to begin entrenching. The Gordon companies on their left were to be ready, if need arose, to support the assaulting party, but were forbidden to fire. The Shropshire Light Infantry from their flanking position were to throw long-range volleys into the main laager as soon as they heard firing, so as to give the impression that a general converging attack was in progress, and to divert the attention of the enemy from the Canadians.

The whole army was on the watch that night. It had been reported that Cronje, whose positions had been shelled by four 6-inch howitzers and three Vickers-Maxims in the afternoon, was about to try to escape, and all the surrounding posts had been strengthened. The 13th and 14th Brigades, which commanded the avenues of egress on the south-eastern and eastern sections of the inner circle, were ordered to meet any attempt to break out with the bayonet, and only to fire towards their front, *i.e.*, in the direction of the laager. A body of newly-arrived colonial mounted troops, under Colonel Le Gallais,[1] and the 2nd, 7th, and 8th Mounted Infantry reinforced the line east of Kitchener's Kop. The 4th and 6th Mounted Infantry between Kameelfontein and Koedoesrand were supported by two squadrons of the 1st Cavalry Brigade. Two more squadrons of cavalry and some guns were in reserve on the nek north of the Koedoesrand ridge, and the remainder of French's Division formed a cordon between that point and Kitchener's Kop.

At the appointed time, under a faint starlight, the Canadians and Engineers left their trench and stole silently forward through the low scrub. For nearly an hour they felt their way along the bank, covering in that time about a quarter of a mile, and every moment expecting discovery; but so silent was their advance that the right companies on the bank were already within 60 yards of the enemy's position when

[1] Consisting of the Burmah Mounted Infantry, Ceylon Mounted Infantry, Grahamstown City Mounted Infantry, Nesbitt's Horse, and the three fresh companies of the New South Wales Mounted Infantry.

two rifle shots rang through the stillness. Before most of the men could throw themselves down the whole trench blazed out, and the same appalling blast of magazine fire which had decimated the Highland Brigade at Magersfontein swept through their extended files. But most of the bullets flew high, and though some men fell riddled with wounds [1] and the companies on the right suffered loss, the whole retained their discipline. The fire was returned with equal vigour; and twelve yards behind, the rear rank started digging. For a few minutes the entire line held on grimly. Then occurred one of those incidents which are so frequent in night attacks. Some one is said to have called out, "Retire and collect your wounded," and before their officers could stop them the four left companies had gone back to the trench held by the Gordons, one or two men being injured by the bayonets of the latter as they stumbled back in the darkness. Luckily the two right companies, G under Captain Macdonald, which had suffered more heavily than any, and H, which had some cover in the wood on the bank, remained firm. Partly protected by a slight undulation of the ground, these 160 men replied so hotly to the enemy's fire that it grew wild, and the entrenching party were able to push forward their work rapidly. Regardless of the flight of bullets that swept over them, the Engineers and the rear rank of the Canadians dug on coolly and methodically, and before day dawned had provided the little party with sufficient cover.

For two hours the firing continued, the Shropshire Light Infantry,[2] with steady rhythmical volleys, supporting the line on the river-bank. At length, at 5.15 a.m., the Boers in front made proposals to surrender, but the Canadians feared a trap and continued firing. At last, in the grey light of the morning, a white flag was hoisted; and General Colvile, who had come up along the river-bed, saw the two opposing lines standing on the top of their trenches with their weapons grounded. In a few minutes one of the enemy came forward and shook hands with him. Others followed, and soon several hundred were standing behind the trench that had been so gallantly won. A little

[1] Two men were wounded in nine and ten places respectively, one of them surviving.

[2] This battalion suffered only one casualty, Lieutenant Atchison, who was wounded.

later a message arrived from Lord Roberts announcing Cronje's unconditional surrender.

The attack of the Canadians[1] had put the finishing touch to the hopeless position of the Boer army. The whole of the western system of his trenches was now open to enfilade, and resistance could scarcely have been continued for another day, even had he been minded to attempt it. At 8 a.m. he rode to Lord Roberts's tent, and the typical English soldier and the typical Boer met, the one clad in the plain uniform of the Staff, with his Kandahar sword at his side, the other in the familiar slouch hat, worn overcoat, and frieze trousers, carrying a whip. "You have made a gallant defence, sir!" was the victor's greeting. Cronje made no reply, and the two sat down to arrange the details of capitulation.

These were soon settled, the vanquished General merely asking for kind treatment and for permission for his wife and a few of his retinue to accompany him. His commandos were formed up under their respective officers, and ordered to cross the Wolvekraal Drift, throwing down their arms as they passed. About midday, under an escort of Highlanders and Buffs, the long file of prisoners, who showed more joy at their release than regret at their coming captivity, wound slowly up from the river-bank that they had held so stubbornly. A stranger force to outward view perhaps never surrendered to a disciplined army. There were men of all ages and nations—Free Staters, Transvaalers, Scandinavians, Germans, Hollanders, Kaffirs. Their clothes, of all makes and descriptions, were in rags; their equipment, even their arms, were of the most varied character. Some were without boots, others walked barefoot, carrying their footgear in their hands. All carried parti-coloured blankets, while here and there some modern article of wear suggested loot; and Mausers, Lee-Metfords, Henry Martinis, elephant guns, and sporting rifles, were mingled with umbrellas, parcels, teapots, bags, bottles, and goloshes; in brief, all the necessaries of

[1] The losses of the Canadians were seven men killed and three officers and thirty-six men wounded. Of these casualties sixteen occurred in Macdonald's company and eleven in the French company, which at the beginning of the attack was on the left of Macdonald.

that strange life of the veldt, half-civilised, half-savage, the few ideas and requirements of which were comprised in the motley crowd streaming through the British camps.

Cronje himself left for Modder River station in the afternoon, and next day, escorted by General Pretyman, went on by rail to Capetown. His men, who showed remarkable marching powers, were sent under the guard of the Gloucester Regiment to the same junction, and were forwarded to the south in batches of 600. Inclusive of 150 wounded men and 36 officers, they numbered 4,105, two-thirds being Transvaalers.[1] The six captured guns belonged to the Free State.

Of the Boer losses in killed or died of disease and wounds, it is not likely that any reliable estimate will ever be forthcoming. The German Staff History estimates them at 74 killed and 195 wounded;

[1] The detailed list is as follows:—

ORANGE FREE STATE.

Locality to which the Commando belongs.	Commandants and Field Cornets.	Number.	
Kroonstadt	Meintjes and one other	134	
Ladybrand	Snyman	134	
Ficksburg	De Villiers	44	
Winburg (1)	J. W. Kok	60	
„ (2)	Oosthuizen	133	
Hoopstadt	Greyling and two others	373	
Bloemfontein Town ...	Akerman	31	
Bloemfontein—			
De Wetsdorp ...	Fourie	104	
Mud River ...	Boshof	67	
Jacobsdal	Smit	16	
Boshof	Grunewald	112	
Petersberg / Fauresmith	—	66	
Vryburg	—	1	
Natives	—	7	
O.F.S. Artillery	Albrecht and three others	45	Three 7·5 cm. Krupps One quick-firing 12-pounder One 3·7 cm. Vickers-Maxim One Maxim
Total	18 officers	1,327 men, six guns	

and it is certainly improbable that the first figure exceeded 200.[1] The small number of prisoners was a disappointment to the conquerors, and gave colour to tales of gigantic slaughter; but allowing for a certain leakage during the retreat, for the detachment of part of the force to escort the heavy artillery past Kimberley towards Barkly West and Riverton and for the few who left the laager before and during the investment,[2] the estimated total of 6,000 men is fairly accounted for.

Of Cronje's tactics little remains to be said. Albrecht seems to have been of opinion that he should have occupied all the neighbouring hills on the 17th and retreated under their cover. But the sudden appearance of the Cavalry within easy shell-range made this scheme, so far as the northern bank was concerned, only realisable by a successful attack; and until the British guns were driven away it was impossible

TRANSVAAL.

Locality to which the Commando belongs.	Commandants and Field Cornets.	Number.
Potchefstroom (1)	Roos and two others	615
„ (2)	Wolmarans, Du Plessis, and one other ...	161
„ (3)	Wolmarans and two others	485
Gatsrand	Maartens, Oosthuizen, and two others ...	446
Bowyk	Terblanch	318
Bloemhof	Woeste, Snyman, and two others	518
Scandinavians	Friis	49
Total	18 officers	2,592 men

	Grand Total.
Men	3,919
Officers	36
„ (wounded)	150
	4,105

[1] After the surrender one large trench was found full of bodies piled two or three deep. Other small graves were also seen, with small pieces of wood marked with initials over each.

[2] Froneman with twenty or thirty followers got out on the 20th and joined De Wet, but the average nightly leakage was certainly very small, amounting, according to the estimate of Burnham the scout, who several times crept close up to the Boer lines, to three or four a day.

to move the waggons. Having failed to overwhelm French while he was still unsupported, nothing remained for him but to withdraw his fighting men and abandon his laager before the investing lines closed round it. That he had ample opportunity of doing this is clear both from English and Boer accounts; and even De Wet's admiration gives way to reproach when he contemplates the ruin that his leader's obstinacy entailed.

For if Pieters' Hill saved Ladysmith and Natal, Paardeberg destroyed the legend of Boer invincibility, and inflicted a blow from the moral and material results of which the enemy were never able to recover. The loss of Cronje, and the capture of 4,000 burghers, combined with the strength of the victorious force and the vigour of its leader, gave the military superiority irrevocably into British hands. From that moment sneers at British defeats and tales of divinely-ordered victories were changed into equally exaggerated stories of our overwhelming numbers. The consequences of the blow on other parts of the theatre of war were startling. At the shock of Cronje's fall, the long line of the Boer commandos in Cape Colony broke into fragments. The clouds of invasion and rebellion were dissipated with extraordinary rapidity; most of the rebels slunk home, the remainder joined the Boer commandos, and the whole rolled northwards in confusion and dismay. So great and sudden are the changes that a single vigorous stroke can effect; so infinitely sensitive is the moral atmosphere in war.

Unfortunately Lord Roberts was unable immediately to reap the fruits of his victory. At the moment a halt was absolutely essential to rest his troops, replenish his supplies, and repair the losses in his transport. In the two days following the surrender he moved his army higher up the Modder above the pestilential atmosphere and foul waters of the laager, and for a week the force stood fast round Osfontein. Only on the banks of the Orange River were active operations continued.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CLEARING OF CAPE COLONY

SITUATION AT COLESBERG AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF GENERAL FRENCH—TROOPS AT CLEMENTS'S DISPOSAL—THEIR DISPOSITION—CONTRACTION OF HIS LINE—THE ENEMY ASSUMES THE OFFENSIVE—EVENTS BETWEEN FEBRUARY 6TH AND FEBRUARY 11TH—BOER ATTACK ON FEBRUARY 12TH—ATTACK ON PINK HILL—GALLANTRY OF THE AUSTRALIANS—ATTACK ON WORCESTER KOPJES—FINE DEFENCE OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGIMENT—RESULTS OF THE FIGHTING—CLEMENTS ORDERS A RETREAT ON RENSBURG—THE 13TH—FURTHER ORDERS FOR A RETREAT ON ARUNDEL—REASONS—MORNING OF THE 14TH—LOSS OF TWO COMPANIES OF THE WILTSHIRE REGIMENT—CLEMENTS'S POSITION AT ARUNDEL—THE BOER OFFENSIVE AT A STANDSTILL—CAUSE OF THIS—ROBERTS'S INSTRUCTIONS TO CLEMENTS—BOER ATTACK OF THE 20TH REPULSED—OPERATIONS OF HENDERSON AND PRICE—FEBRUARY 24TH—RESUMPTION OF THE OFFENSIVE BY THE BRITISH—PARTIAL SUCCESS OF THE OPERATIONS—ARRIVAL OF LORD KITCHENER—BEGINNING OF THE BOER RETREAT—ENTRY OF CLEMENTS INTO COLESBERG—HIS POLICY—IMPORTANCE OF THE ROAD BRIDGE DURING HIS ADVANCE TOWARDS NORVAL'S PONT—PROGRESS OF CLEMENTS—DESTRUCTION OF THE RAILWAY BRIDGE—PREPARATIONS OF CLEMENTS FOR CROSSING THE ORANGE RIVER—DESTRUCTION OF THE ROAD BRIDGE—INCREASING EVIDENCES OF THE BOER RETREAT—CLEMENTS CROSSES BY A PONTOON BRIDGE—END OF HIS OPERATIONS—POSITION OF GATACRE IN THE MIDDLE OF FEBRUARY—THE COLONIAL DIVISION—QUESTION OF THE DIVIDED COMMAND—MOUNTED TROOPS LEFT UNDER GATACRE—BRABANT'S MARCH ON DORDRECHT—REASONS FOR THE HALT AT DORDRECHT—BOER ATTACK ON PENHOEK AND BIRD'S RIVER—GENERAL SITUATION—RECONNAISSANCE OF FEBRUARY 23RD AND DEATH OF DE MONTMORENCY—FURTHER INACTIVITY OF GATACRE—CAPTURE OF LABUSCHAGNE'S NEK BY BRABANT—ADVANCE TO ALIWAL NORTH—BRIDGE SAVED—ADVANCE OF GATACRE—MACNEILL'S RIDE TO BETHULIE—DESTRUCTION OF THE RAILWAY BRIDGE—ROAD BRIDGE SAVED—ADVANCE OF GATACRE'S MAIN BODY—RETREAT OF ENEMY—GATACRE'S ENTRY INTO BETHULIE—INACTIVITY OF THE COLONIAL DIVISION AT ALIWAL NORTH—CAUSES—THE SECOND PART OF LORD ROBERTS'S PLAN ACCOMPLISHED

IT will be remembered that at the end of January, 1900, General French left the scene of his successes round Colesberg and repaired to Capetown to confer with Lord Roberts as to the contemplated operations to the north of the Orange River. On February 3rd he returned to Rensburg, leaving it finally on the 6th, when he handed over the command to Major-General Clements. With French went

nearly all the Cavalry and two batteries of Horse Artillery, together with the 1st Essex and 1st Yorkshire regiments.

Clements's position was now one of great difficulty and responsibility. The diminution of his force rendered a further prosecution of French's offensive designs impracticable; indeed, it was more than doubtful whether he would be able even to maintain his positions if the enemy attacked him in earnest. Yet from every point of view a retirement was extremely undesirable. The objects of most immediate importance were the protection of Naauwport and its stores, now being largely augmented with a view to the future supply of Bloemfontein; but the security of the railway to the south and of the cross-line from De Aar were also material to our position in the Colony; and with every mile that the enemy advanced the danger of their interruption was increased. Clements's aim, therefore, was to hold as forward a line as possible and to delay the invaders by every means in his power until Lord Roberts's advance should take effect and compel them to fall back to secure their own line of retreat.

If the Boers acted with vigour he would be obliged to retreat. The enemy's lines spread widely round the central bastion of Colesberg[1] were in a position to manœuvre effectively against the weak British flanks. Schoeman, the Boer commander, had recently been heavily reinforced; his numbers at this period, judging from information afterwards obtained at Colesberg, amounted to 8,500 men, and his lieutenants, Grobler on the right and Delarey on the left, were not likely to be satisfied with a defence merely passive.[2] Clements's only hope of preserving his positions lay in a policy of bluff, in holding the different fixed stations as weakly as was compatible with bare safety, and in keeping small mobile columns ready at any moment to reinforce a

[1] All the enemy's positions round Colesberg were well entrenched, the more important with two tiers of shelter trenches, and with gun-emplacements.

[2] Commandant Runck gives the following estimates of the Boer forces:—

	Men.	Guns.
Grobelaar	1,200	4
Schoeman (in the centre) ...	2,000	6
Delarey	2,000	4
	5,200	14

threatened point. By such means he might just succeed in maintaining himself where French had left him, although the attempt involved the daily risk of seeing his centre pierced or his flanks turned by superior forces.

Completely to carry out the policy of bluff necessitated the maintenance of all the positions previously held; and to this Clements felt himself unequal. The withdrawal of French's troops had not merely reduced his force numerically; it had deprived it of more than half of its power. Of the Cavalry there remained only two squadrons of Inniskillings, both weakened by the hard work of the preceding weeks. Four-and-a-half battalions of infantry,[1] one battery each of field and horse artillery, one company of engineers, and two 5-inch howitzers, completed the whole of the regular troops. They were reinforced by Hoad's Australian Regiment, which, it will be remembered, consisted of the five infantry companies forming part of the first contingents and of a company of Victorian Mounted Rangers. About the middle of January it had been definitely decided to mount these infantry companies; and by the beginning of February most of them were at Naauwpoort collecting horses and equipment. As most of the men could ride, the new formations became much more rapidly efficient than was the case with the regular infantry, but the results still left much to be desired, and as no horses were immediately available for the Victorian Rifles and the South Australian Infantry,[2] the companies of the New South Wales men, West Australians, Tasmanians, and Victorian Rangers, numbering at the most 400 rifles, were at first the only ones available as mounted troops. Probably the total number of sabres and rifles did not exceed 4,000 men, and from this deductions must be made for detachments employed on baggage guards and escort duty.[3] Such being the case, it is not surprising to find General Clements reducing his front by the abandonment of Potfontein, Kleintoren, and Rhenosterfontein, and supporting his right

[1] No battalion had more than seven companies, each having given up one to be turned into mounted infantry.

[2] These companies were mounted on February 7th. Many of them could not ride.

[3] Also sick men and men with sick horses, &c.

rear behind Slingersfontein by the reoccupation of Jasfontein.[1] On the western side of the railway he held French's old posts of Kloof Camp, Windmill Camp, Coleskop, Maeder's and Porter's Hill, with picquets at Hobkirk's Farm and Bastard's Nek. His headquarters remained with a small reserve at Rensburg. Even when thus diminished, his front, measured from Jasfontein to Hobkirk's, extended fully twenty-five miles as the crow flies, by road considerably more. But the withdrawal of the eastern posts was a sign of weakness of which the enemy were not slow to take advantage.[2]

On the morning of February 6th, two Horse Artillery guns, half a squadron of cavalry, and the West Australians left Slingersfontein to reconnoitre towards Potfontein. The farm was shelled, and the force advanced towards the hills to the north; but though a good many Boers

[1] See map, p. 164, for operations up to the end of February.

[2] After the redistribution of February 6th, Clements's force was distributed thus:—

West of the Railway (left wing).

Kloof Camp—
New South Wales Mounted Infantry.
Victorian Rifles.
4 Companies 2nd Wiltshire Regiment.
2 Companies Berkshire Regiment.

MacCracken Hill—
2 Companies Berkshire Regiment.

Windmill Camp—
3 troops Inniskillings.
Victorian Mounted Rangers.

Maeder's Farm—
1 troop Inniskillings.
4 guns 4th Battery Royal Field Artillery (2 guns sent by day to Porter's Hill).
South Australian Infantry.
3 Companies 2nd Wiltshire Regiment.

Coleskop—
2 guns 4th Battery Royal Field Artillery.
1 Company 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment.

Porter's Hill—
2 Companies 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment.

Hobkirk's Farm and Bastard's Nek were held by picquets.

were known to be in the vicinity, they made no sign till the troops began to retire. Upon this the enemy opened a heavy fire, and pressing forward, tried to cut off the guns. Oorlog's Spruit, which lay between them and Slingersfontein, was only passable by artillery at certain spots owing to the steepness of its banks; and the rearguard had some difficulty in getting clear. An artilleryman was mortally wounded, a West Australian hit, and several men were captured. The Colonials under Captain Moore behaved excellently; but the result of the reconnaissance was not calculated to impress the enemy. At 9 o'clock on that evening it was found necessary to send Major Stubbs with a company of Worcesters to a hill on the left bank of the Spruit to prevent a party of Boers working round the rear of the camp at Slingers. He succeeded in forestalling the enemy, and occupied the hill, which was afterwards known by his name.

Next day the reconnaissance was repeated, but the artillery did not pass Oorlog's Spruit. A number of the enemy tried to seize the southern end of Stubbs's Hill and attack the guns, but the Worcestershire company

Rensburg—Headquarters.
1 Company Royal Engineers.
4 Companies 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment.
2 guns "J" Battery Royal Horse Artillery.
120 Australians, principally details of different companies; for the most part unhorsed.
3 Australian Maxims.

East of the Railway (right flank).

Slingersfontein—
1st Royal Irish Regiment.
2nd Worcester Regiment.
4 guns "J" Battery Royal Horse Artillery.
1 Squadron Inniskillings.
West Australians.

Jasfontein—
Tasmanians.
10 Rimington's Guides.

The left wing was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Carter, 2nd Wiltshire Regiment. His headquarters were at Maeder's. The right wing was directed by Lieutenant-Colonel Hacket-Pain, 2nd Worcestershire Regiment, at Slingersfontein. The two howitzers, disguised as waggons, were moved from flank to flank as they were required.

drove them off towards Potfontein. On the 8th, as the situation on the right flank was still undefined, Rimington's Guides were sent back to reconnoitre in the neighbourhood of Tweedale Station, six miles south of Arundel, and thirty Australians with six of French's Guides were ordered to be ready to march next morning to reinforce Captain Cameron and the Tasmanians at Jasfontein. The two howitzers, which had come round to Slingers on the 3rd, took post on Maddocks Hill and shelled a Creusot gun stationed south of Blues Hill.[1] During the day an important piece of intelligence was received. Two Boers who had ridden in to surrender to Colonel Hacket-Pain, stated that permission to attack the British positions on February 12th had been obtained from Pretoria.

On February 9th a wide reconnaissance took place along our eastern flank. On the extreme right rear Captain Salmon, marching before dawn from Rensburg, joined Cameron at Jasfontein; and the latter with about fifty men moved out to the north-east to reconnoitre Koetze's Farm. He reached the neighbourhood of the farm; but in endeavouring to turn the flank of a party of the enemy he was himself outflanked and obliged to retire. His supporting force under Hamilton was cut off and narrowly escaped capture in a gateway, and the whole had to beat a hasty retreat to Jasfontein, losing two killed and six men missing. Lambie, a war correspondent, was shot.

Meanwhile Captain Haig, with his squadron of Inniskillings, a few West Australians under Moore and four guns of J Battery, moved southwards from Slingersfontein, and came in touch with a strong force of the enemy about three miles from camp. These men were occupying a mass of kopjes to the south of Stubbs's Hill, and between it and the farm which Cameron was reconnoitring. Pushing on with twenty-three men, Moore occupied a detached hillock close to the main ridge, and was heavily attacked at the shortest range by Boers who had ascended its opposite side. Only the vigorous action of the Horse Artillery, which fired 514 shells during the skirmish, saved him from being surrounded. Throughout the day the little party, at the cost of one man killed and three wounded, kept the enemy at

[1] Elaborate arrangements had been made by the enemy for the safe service of this gun.

arm's length; until at dusk, during a lull in the firing, they succeeded in reaching their horses, and galloped back in a clump, trusting to the dust to cover their retreat. Amazing as it appears, they reached camp without further casualties. So many and so dispersed were the posts which the Infantry had at this time to hold that not a single company had been available to help the mounted troops.[1] A fresh and significant demand was made upon Colonel Hacket-Pain's small force that very day. Two companies of the Royal Irish Regiment had to be sent southwards to a hill which overlooked the waggon road to Rensburg in order to check the advance of parties of Boers who were already threatening that important line of communication. Slingers Camp itself was shelled during the afternoon by a gun situated in rear of the ridge from which Moore had been attacked. The results of the fighting, negligible enough in themselves, distinctly intimated a turning movement against the British right; and mule waggons were now kept ready to move the Infantry at a moment's notice.

Disquieted by reports of the enemy's progress, the British General himself came out from Rensburg on the morning of the 10th accompanied by fifty or sixty Australians and the remaining section of J Battery. In co-operation with troops from Slingers he attacked the western and north-western faces of the hills held by the enemy on the preceding day, and succeeded in driving them back over Oorlog's Spruit. In the afternoon he recalled the howitzers, which on the 8th had moved to Porter's Hill, to Slingersfontein.

On the 9th appeared the first sign of a coming attack against the left flank. The two posts at Hobkirk's Farm and on Bastard's Nek, which were furnished by the Inniskillings and Victorian Mounted Rangers, were driven in on Windmill Camp with the loss of two men killed, five wounded, and one missing. On the arrival of reinforcements the hills south of Hobkirk's were reoccupied, but the Boers remained in possession of the farm; and during the day it was deemed desirable to reinforce the left wing with two companies of the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment, the Victorian Mounted Infantry, a few South Australians, and

[1] Only one company from each battalion remained to guard the camp.

forty of the New South Wales contingent. Pink Hill, an isolated kopje on the north-west of Windmill Camp and about a mile south of Hobkirk's, was occupied by a mixed force of about 200 men under Major Eady. On Saturday the 10th, although a good deal of sniping and shelling went on, the enemy made no movement; Sunday, as usual, passed quietly. On both flanks, however, all preparations were made for the attack which was now seen to be inevitable.[1]

Before dawn on the morning of the 12th Eddy's troops stood to their arms. Pink Hill seems to have been a typical South African ridge, broad, long-shouldered, and boulder-strewn. On its left or western extremity were fifty of the Victorian Mounted Infantry under McInerney, Tremearne, and Powell in a widely extended line of groups. On their right were twenty-five of the Mounted Rangers under Lieutenant Roberts; next to them three troops of Inniskillings and a company of the Wiltshire Regiment. Twenty South Australians were in reserve. In the plain, perhaps a mile to their right rear, lay Windmill Camp, entrenched and held by seventy-five men of the Victorian Rangers and forty men of the New South Wales Mounted Infantry.

At dawn a 40-lb. howitzer opened fire on the camp from the direction of Bastard's Nek and shelled for an hour until it was temporarily silenced by two guns of the 4th Battery which had been sent up by Carter. A lull followed, during which that officer himself arrived, bringing what few men he could spare from his other positions. A small force, with the two remaining field guns, he left in reserve at Maeder's.[2]

[1] It is interesting to observe from the events of the preceding days how completely the two sides had exchanged parts. Slow and feeble as the development of the enemy's offensive was, from February 6th onwards the initiative in spite of the counter demonstrations of the British, passed into the hands of the Boers. That their movements at first betrayed hesitation is perhaps to be ascribed to the bogus telegram published about this time to the effect that large reinforcements of Infantry were moving up to Rensburg, and that the Cavalry had temporarily withdrawn to rest.

[2] The exact composition of the reinforcements sent to Pink Hill is not clear. Probably they consisted of a few Australians and a company of the Wiltshire Regiment. Major Reay mentions eighty of the Bedfordshire Regiment as being present, but as the nearest part of the battalion was the single company guarding the guns on Coleskop—the

For some time after the cessation of the Boer shell-fire nothing of importance took place; but as the morning advanced a long-range rifle-fire opened from the hills beyond Hobkirk's Farm. This post, after a brief reoccupation by some men of the Wiltshire Regiment, had again to be abandoned; and at about 11.30 a.m., under cover of the fire of two or three pompoms, the enemy turned the left of the British position and began to pour a heavy shower of bullets along the western flank and crest of Pink Hill. At the same time other parties of Boers appeared on the flats to the north of Windmill Camp, and their artillery re-opened fire.

From this moment the fighting became fiercer, and losses were frequent. Probably the comparative openness of the ground on our left and left rear alone prevented Major Eddy's position from being surrounded and cut off from Maeder's. Even as things were it required all his men's tenacity to hold their position. The leftern-most group was surprised and almost annihilated by Mauser fire; all the five officers were killed or wounded, and twenty-five men were killed, wounded, or taken. It was a severe ordeal for troops who had scarcely been under fire, but the Australians never flinched. Despite the enormously extensive position which they occupied and the increasing gun and rifle fire, they managed to maintain themselves till 3 p.m., when the near approach and swelling numbers of the enemy made the hill untenable. Major Eddy himself was one of the last to remain, and died gallantly on the crest of the ridge soon after he had issued orders for a retirement. During the afternoon Carter's force fell back on Maeder's, the Australians further distinguishing themselves by covering the retreat of the Wiltshire companies. The enemy made no serious effort to press, and by dusk Clements's left wing had reached Maeder's, exhausted but intact.

rest were at Porter's Hill and Rensburg—this is probably incorrect. The only other place from which reinforcements could have come was Kloof Camp, held by four companies of the Wiltshire and two of the Berkshire Regiment, which was farther from Windmill Camp than was Maeder's. Moreover the line of approach to the scene of fighting was from the former point more exposed. In any case the reinforcements available were extremely small. The best account that we have read of the Pink Hill fight is contained in Major Reay's book on the Australian contingents.

Meanwhile on the right a still more dangerous assault had been met with equal resolution. The most exposed position in this quarter was the long ridge known as Worcester Kopjes [1] some three miles to the north-east of Slingersfontein camp, looking eastward over Oorlog's Spruit and Kleintoren, and northwards and north-westwards to the other Boer positions south of Auchtertang Station. Its western flank towards Colesberg was covered by New Zealand Hill, about a mile distant, which with Maddocks Hill on its left rear completed the outer ring of defence round the central camp. The right rear of the Worcester Kopjes along Oorlog's Spruit was guarded by the posts on the Platzberg and Stubbs's Hill, and was further supported by the hills east of Slingersfontein itself. But the tenability of these positions depended on the safe keeping of the Worcester Kopjes, which formed the north-eastern angle of the rough quadrilateral held by the British right. If they fell, the whole system of defence east of Rensburg would fall with them.

On the night of February 11th–12th one company of the 2nd Worcester was at Stubbs's Hill, three sections of another on the Platzberg; two were in camp. The Royal Irish had three companies on New Zealand Hill, two at Maddocks Hill, and two at Royal Irish Hill watching over the Rensburg road. The Worcester Kopjes were held by the three remaining companies of the Worcester Regiment under the command of Major Stubbs aided by Captains Howell and Thomas. The perimeter guarded by these fourteen companies of infantry was probably as great as that defended by White at Ladysmith; [2] and with the exception of about 150 mounted men and the artillery at Slingers Camp there were no troops available as a reserve. The Worcester Kopjes alone measured close on 4,000 yards from east to west. They were divided into three sections. The right or eastern section, which was the highest, lay at right angles to the others, much as the head of a hammer does to its handle. On it were three peaks from 200 to 300 feet high, one at its north-eastern, one at

[1] See map, p. 164.

[2] It is not suggested, of course, that the Ladysmith position could have been held by fourteen companies.

its southern, and one at its eastern extremity, the last-named jutting out considerably to the eastward and connecting with some lower bush-covered folds of ground on the banks of Oorlog's Spruit. These peaks were known respectively as Observation Hill, Pinnacle Hill and Burnt Hill. At its northernmost point was a smaller eminence which was unnamed. The ground between and behind the peaks was fairly level and free from stones. The entire length of the hammer-head measured about 1,600 yards from north to south, and its mean width, excluding the offshoot of Burnt Hill, was about 400 yards. The central section forming the middle of the handle ran west from the centre of the hammer-head for 1,400 yards. The left section, a lower hill, extended for 1,200 yards in the same direction. The middle ridge was divided from the others by deep hollows, in which were runnels of water. Both the left and central section were in some measure overlooked by the peaks on the right, which were at once the key of the whole position and the portion most exposed to the enemy's attack.

Each hill section was occupied by one company, C under Thomas being on the left, A under Howell in the centre, E under Stubbs on the right. Everything was ready for defence. The warning of the Boer prisoners given three days before had been confirmed by the enemy's movements. On the morning of the 11th a gun was seen in position at Holler Farm north of New Zealand Hill; another was observed during the same day on a ridge north-east of the Worcester Kopjes; and a large sangar was visible on a wooded knoll 2,500 yards east of Burnt Hill. Before dark Stubbs inspected the positions, warned each of his sections that an attack was expected in the morning, and ordered them "to fill water-bottles and to be ready to scatter into a firing-line as soon as dawn began to appear."[1] His company, which numbered ninety-five rifles, was disposed in groups along the line of peaks, and, facing east, covered three-quarters of a mile of front, Major Stubbs himself watching the head of the recess in the angle between Burnt and Observation Hills, which, owing to the

[1] For the account of this action we are greatly indebted to an interesting narrative which appeared in the *United Services Magazine* of August, 1901.

cover it afforded, seemed a likely line of attack. The regimental Maxim was north of Observation Hill.

As at Waggon Hill, the attack began before dawn. A strong force, including 400 Zarps and 700 Free Staters, advanced from the bushy kopjes to the eastward and the northward; and, driving bodies of Kaffirs in front of them, effected a lodgment on the outer faces of the peaks under cover of darkness. At 3.30 a.m. the first shot was fired, and the rattle of musketry speedily became general. The advanced sangars on the right of the British line, in front of Pinnacle Hill, found themselves under fire from Burnt Hill; and it soon became evident that the few men on that important point had been driven back. At 4.30 a.m. Stubbs ordered Lieutenant Bartholomew, who was commanding at Pinnacle Hill, to recapture the lost position; the lieutenant led eight men to the assault, and had got within ten yards of the top, when three of the little party were struck down by a furious fire which made further advance impossible. The darkness enabled the rest to fall back to their sangar; but at dawn the increasing fire rendered even this untenable, and they retired to Pinnacle Hill.

Meanwhile a body of Boers had advanced against the central section. Captain Howell heard them coming up the slope, and shouted "Fix bayonets!" The mention of the dreaded weapon was enough, and the attack was not pressed home. But until the strength and intention of the enemy were known he dared not reinforce Stubbs, the sound of whose firing showed that he was fiercely engaged. At last, just as dawn was breaking, he received a message to the effect that Burnt Hill was taken, and ordered Captain Thomas on the left section to reinforce the right. Leaving half his men behind, the last-named officer moved along the hillside in rear of Howell and joined Stubbs, with whom he lined the western edge of the plateau behind the peaks. By this time the whole of the left and centre of Stubbs's original line had been forced back, and the enemy were plainly visible on the conquered positions, firing heavily at the scattered men on the lower ground. Only Pinnacle Hill, which Stubbs directed Bartholomew to hold to the last, still remained in our hands.

Once again, as at Cæsar's Camp, the enemy had well-nigh mastered our strongest position; once again their lack of initiative prevented them from pressing on to complete the victory. They would not face the fire of 200 rifles in the open. Never once, not even at the moment of the first attack, did the Worcestershire men lose their steadiness. Soon after daybreak the enemy's advance was arrested, and not another inch did they gain in the long hours that followed. The British made several efforts to regain the captured hills. Both officers and men behaved nobly. Early in the morning Major Stubbs led eight men against Burnt Hill; and he himself died gallantly at the head of his party, all the rest save one being killed or wounded. His last command when summoned by the enemy to surrender was "Stand firm!"—"Firm" being the motto of the regiment. Captain Thomas had fallen mortally wounded a little while before. Lieutenant Buxton, of A Company, who early in the morning had come up in support of Lieutenant Carr on the extreme left, was now lying severely wounded; many of his men had been killed or injured. Carr was also hit, though less seriously than Buxton. But still the remainder, now reinforced by the fire of A Company from behind, held stiffly to the plateau edge and Pinnacle Hill, and the white lines of their bullet splashes on the rocks and the heavy losses of the enemy bore witness to the accuracy of their shooting.[1]

At 7 a.m. the artillery of both sides joined in and fired intermittently throughout the day. Two guns of J Battery and the howitzers shelled the lost hills effectively.[2] During the morning Clements himself rode up from Rensburg with Lieutenant-Colonel Coningham. The latter was sent to take over the command; but he had scarcely reached Pinnacle Hill when, in standing up to get a better view of the enemy, he was shot through the heart.

Fortunately the vigour of the attack was already broken. By mid-

[1] Both battalions of the regiment seem for years to have been noted for their excellence in musketry.

[2] In the afternoon the lyddite shells of a howitzer set the brushwood on fire—a chance which nearly proved fatal to Lieutenant Buxton, who was still lying where he had fallen. Fortunately the flames did not reach him, and at 4 a.m. on the next morning he managed to get back to Slingers Camp, where he was found by an ambulance.

day the enemy had been driven off the exposed faces of Observation and Burnt Hills, and for the rest of the day made no attempt to advance further. At 6 p.m. the scattered companies were collected, and retired unmolested upon Slingersfontein. Their gallant resistance, which had cost five officers and forty-seven men killed and wounded, had not only gained the British General the respite he needed, but, like the determined fighting of the Australians on the opposite flank, had banished from the enemy's mind all thoughts of immediate pursuit.[1]

Successfully as the wings had held their own, bodies of the enemy were already threatening Clements's rear, and would have obliged him to retreat, even if he had dared to await a fresh assault with men exhausted with fighting. Early in the afternoon he returned to Rensburg, and immediately issued orders for a retirement on that place during the night. No movement was made until dusk, but as soon as the night closed in all the British posts west of the railway were evacuated; and Colonel Carter's troops fell back, covering the withdrawal of the guns from Coleskop and of the heavy baggage from the camps. This difficult and critical operation was carried out without a hitch, the Australian Mounted Infantry again covering the withdrawal of the Infantry. East of the railway the same success attended the movement. During the evening the Worcestershire companies were joined at Slingersfontein by the Royal Irish, who had been lightly attacked in the course of the day, and by the remaining companies of their own regiment, one of which had had to repel an attack on Stubbs's Hill. At midnight the whole retired, leaving their fires burning and tents standing. Moving by the road Clements had followed during his reconnaissance on the 10th, they avoided a body of 500 Boers who had already blocked the ordinary convoy route to the

[1] There is no doubt that the enemy suffered heavily in this action. A Dutch farmer who took part in it afterwards admitted to a loss of fifty-one out of the ninety-seven men who had composed his commando; and from information gathered from other Boer sources it seems probable that the enemy lost forty in killed alone. E Company of the Worcestershires lost fifteen men killed, twenty-three wounded, and five prisoners, or about 40 per per cent. of their strength. The total losses of the three companies amounted to three officers and sixteen men killed, two officers and thirty-one men wounded.

south,[1] and reached Rensburg early in the morning of the 13th, a march of fully ten miles. Considering the hard work of the day, this performance must be regarded as exceptional and as reflecting great credit on the care and coolness of Colonel Hacket-Pain.

During the night the enemy made no attempt to follow the movements of either wing. Exhausted by the fighting of the 12th, they probably did not realise until next morning that Slingersfontein had been evacuated. Moreover, there seems reason for thinking that they were awaiting their artillery; and it is possible that the bogus telegrams, already referred to, induced doubts into their minds as to Clements's strength in infantry.

But although unmolested by the enemy, there was little rest for the tired troops on the 13th. At 3.30 a.m. the Wiltshire Regiment and two companies of the Bedfords were halted to hold an outpost line on the hills north-west of Rensburg; the half-battalion of the Berkshire Regiment held the ground north of the village; four Bedford companies and the Royal Irish Regiment covered it on the north-east and east. The mounted troops and the artillery took ground in rear of the wings of infantry. The Worcesters were placed in reserve. Behind this screen the large quantity of stores in Rensburg were entrained with the utmost despatch and sent back to Arundel; where General Clements had from the first determined to make a stand, should the positions round Colesberg become untenable.

The main reason for this decision was a tactical one. For so small a force Rensburg was not a good defensive position. A very large perimeter would have had to be held; the great mass of the Taaiboschlaagte alone required a powerful garrison; and Jasfontein itself would have had to be occupied in order to prevent the enemy turning that flank and moving on Arundel and the British line of communication. The water supply would have been a further difficulty. There was none on the Taaiboschlaagte, the nearest east of the railway being at Jasfontein; and even at Rensburg there was only one well, all drinking water for the troops stationed there having had to be

[1] These men saw the dust of the retiring column, and concluded that reinforcements were being sent to Slingersfontein.

brought in tanks by rail. On the other hand, the Arundel position was particularly strong and of a size suitable to Clements's force; the flanks were not easily turned; water was fairly plentiful; and once posted there he could effectively cover the stores at Naauwpoort and the De Aar railway. If the flanks were again turned it was intended to fall back on Naauwpoort.[1]

Clements had gained but a short start of his pursuers. During the morning of the 13th the troops on the west flank began to be harassed by snipers; and as the day advanced the enemy were seen building gun-emplacements on the surrounding hills. Seeing that if the enemy made good their footing on the Taaiboschlaagte they might seriously interfere with a retirement on Arundel, the British General decided to hasten his retreat, and at 8 o'clock in the evening he cancelled his previous orders for a march at daybreak and issued directions for a start at midnight. The precaution was a wise one. Late in the afternoon of the 13th a British doctor, who had been sent with an ambulance to Hobkirk's, was told by one of the enemy that Clements was going to trek from Rensburg in the night. Probably the channel of information had been the native drivers and camp followers. At any rate the Boers were aware of his first intentions a few hours after they had been made known to the troops; and had he not moved earlier his retirement would probably have been disturbed by the enemy's guns.

Owing to the darkness it was difficult for the orderlies to reach the various commanders early enough to allow them to withdraw their picquets[2] by the appointed time; and a delay of an hour and a half was caused by the non-arrival of a company and a half of the Royal Irish Regiment. However, at 1.30 a.m.[3] all were reported present, and the order was given to march. The retirement was carried out in three

[1] At this time Naauwpoort was garrisoned by a militia battalion (the 9th Bat. K.R.R.), three companies of which had been moved to Arundel. A little later a field battery and a battalion of South Lancashire Militia arrived. These troops had to find detachments at Thebus and Hanover Road Station. On February 12th and 13th the latter place was reinforced by the 2nd Victorian Contingent, numbering 303 horses.

[2] It was intended that these should be relieved by the mounted troops at 10 p.m.

[3] The last train left Rensburg at midnight; a small amount of forage, which could not be removed, was destroyed.

columns. The main body of the central column was composed of the Worcestershire Regiment, three companies of the Bedfordshire, the howitzers, the Royal Engineers, the Field Hospital and the Bearer Company; the advanced guard consisted of the four remaining companies of the Bedfordshire, the rearguard of the half-battalion of the Berkshire Regiment. The two flanking columns were each formed of a squadron of cavalry, a battalion of infantry and a battery. Outside the mass of regular troops moved the Australians; the Victorian Mounted Infantry being in front, the South Australians in the rear, the Victorian Rangers on the right flank, the West Australians on the left. The retirement was carried out without molestation, and Arundel was reached at dawn of the 14th. An hour later Colonel Carter reported that two companies of the Wiltshire Regiment were missing. All the mounted troops and J Battery, under Colonel Henderson, at once turned back to find them, and about 6.30 a.m. two miles north of Arundel came upon a half-company of the Bedfordshire Regiment, which had been reported missing soon after the mounted troops had started. Why it had become separated from the column has not transpired. The detachment were actually under fire at the time, and but for the timely support of the mounted men might have failed to reach camp.

It was already too late to save the Wiltshire companies. They had come in from Vaalkop early on the preceding evening after being relieved by the mounted troops, and had rendezvoused to the east of the Rensburg kopjes before the rest of their battalion retired. Owing to various misunderstandings, the chief responsibility for which was held by the subsequent Court of Enquiry to rest with Lieutenant-Colonel Carter,[1] they either did not receive or did not understand the order to start at midnight; and remained halted and ready to move at 5 a.m. in accordance with their original instructions. Not until 3.45 a.m., when a patrol sent to communicate with the main outpost line found that it had vanished and that Rensburg had already been abandoned, did they realise that they had been left behind.

They started at once for Arundel in fighting formation, but were almost immediately attacked and surrounded by nearly a thousand of the

[1] See Appendix volume to Report of Royal Commission, p. 413.

enemy, part of whom cut them off from the high ground of the Taaiboschlaagte, where a prolonged resistance might have been possible. The plain on which they were was absolutely coverless. Nevertheless, in spite of their hopeless situation they struggled on gallantly, and by 6 a.m. had got to a point about six miles from Arundel,[1] when Major Stock and a few men were isolated and taken prisoners. At 6.20 a.m. a fresh body of the enemy appeared from the south. Soon afterwards the commanding officer, Major MacMullen, was mortally wounded; but the remainder continued to fight in small groups until all had been forced to surrender. To the end no white flag was raised, and fifty-six men, or about 35 per cent. of the detachment, were killed and wounded; 102 surrendered. The mounted troops only arrived in time to see the prisoners being taken into the Taaiboschlaagte,[2] and themselves came under the fire of the Creusot gun posted on the ridge. The incident was deplorable, but although nothing can excuse the mistake to which it was due, some allowance must be made for the extreme exhaustion from which the troops, and not least the officer commanding the battalion, were suffering at the time. For over forty hours Colonel Carter and his men can have had little or no sleep, and had spent the whole of the time in fighting, marching, or on outpost duty.

The British column spent the day in occupying the hills that cover Arundel to north, east, and west.[3] On the northern side General Clements held two lines of these kopjes; the most advanced with outposts furnished by the mounted troops, the rearmost, which rose in horseshoe form three miles further back, with his infantry. Nestled under the southern slopes of these last, on either side of Arundel Station, were his camps. Next day (February 15th), owing to reports of Boer outflanking movements on the east and west, strong, entrenched posts were established on Dragoon Hill and Berkshire Hill, two isolated eminences respectively eight and four miles to the south-west

[1] See map, p. 164.

[2] If Colonel Carter reported the mishap at 6 a.m. the mounted troops could not have started much before 6.30 a.m., if so soon. The fight was practically over before they left the main body.

[3] See for the following operations, map on p. 164.

and south-east of Arundel Station. Each of these were occupied by four companies of infantry, 200 mounted troops and two guns. Measured from these points the front held by Clements, inclusive of the advanced ridge occupied by the mounted men, was about twenty-two miles in circumference; the diameter about half that distance. The dangers of this wide extension were more apparent than real. The Boers were not likely to attack its front, and as long as the flanks remained intact and unturned the force and its communication with Naauwpoort were perfectly safe. Moreover, while the outer hill-circle remained in British hands the enemy's guns could not approach near enough to shell the central camps.

As a matter of fact the position was never seriously imperilled. It was naturally expected that the enemy would at once press on and do their utmost to improve their previous success, but here as elsewhere the Boer strategy showed irresolution and half-heartedness. In this case, however, the fault lay with the authorities at Bloemfontein. On the very day of Clements's retirement to Arundel, the day before the relief of Kimberley, Steyn telegraphed Commandant De Wet:[1] "As long as you are able to hold the positions you are in with the men you have, do so; if not, come here as quickly as circumstances will allow, as matters here are taking a serious turn." Lord Roberts's advance had already paralysed the enemy's initiative in Cape Colony. Steyn's message betrays not only anxiety, but also hesitation. In view of the gravity of the situation on the Modder a defensive attitude at Colesberg was useless. An immediate abandonment of Cape Colony, or a vigorous offensive against Clements to be followed, whether successful or not, by the breaking of the bridges on the Orange River and a rapid transference of all the available men by rail through Bloemfontein to Cronje's assistance, would have been a sounder policy. The result of the course pursued by the President, in itself a striking example of how easy it is even for brave and able men to fail in the

[1] This telegram was found in Colesberg when it was occupied by the British troops. The *Times* correspondent stated that it was dated "14th." It is possible, however, that Commandant Runck is right in saying that Steyn sent it on the 20th, for the Boers attacked on that day, but abandoned the offensive almost immediately.

great crises of war, was to render a decisive success against Clements impossible and considerably to diminish the force that might have been sent to support Cronje. If on the night of the 14th arrangements had been made for the withdrawal of the Boers at Colesberg several thousands might have reached Paardeberg on the 19th or 20th and joined De Wet on Kitchener's Kop. As it was they wasted five days in inactivity in front of Clements, attacked him ineffectively on the 20th, and a few days later were obliged to retire by events which they should have endeavoured to anticipate and control.

No exact knowledge of the cause of the enemy's sudden halt seems to have reached General Clements, but he must have been aware of the relief of Kimberley and of Cronje's retreat; and he may well have guessed, even before the arrival of Roberts's telegram, that the pressure on the Modder was affecting the enemy in front of him. In any case the function of his column remained the same. Patrols were pushed west and east daily, and on the 15th and 17th reconnaissances went north towards Taaiboschlaagte and Vaalkop, on both occasions drawing the fire of the enemy's artillery. This consisted of a heavy gun, two field guns, and three Maxims dispersed along the Rensburg Hills as in the days of French's advance, the greater number being placed west of the railway in the neighbourhood of Kuilfontein. On the 18th arrived the telegram from the Commander-in-Chief saying that he expected that the number of Boers at Colesberg would soon materially decrease, and urging Clements to push on and repair the bridges on the Orange River as soon as he could. But at the moment these instructions could not be carried out, for on the following afternoon the enemy at last showed some signs of activity, and began to move southwards in the direction of the De Aar railway.

On the 20th the Boers made a general attack on his flanks and front. The mounted troops on the advanced ridge to the north were shelled from the Taaiboschlaagte and were attacked by snipers from the east; and at 8 a.m. another gun opened to the south-east from the kopjes opposite Berkshire Hill. At the same time Boer riflemen under Delarey advanced from behind these ridges and took up positions threatening our right flank. But the movement was met in time. Part

of the mounted troops and the portion of J Battery stationed on the west of the railway were brought over to reinforce the Australians at Berkshire Hill and together they succeeded in outflanking the enemy, who retired towards the north and east. Meanwhile two 5-inch guns, which had only arrived on the preceding day, did good service in silencing the enemy's guns on the Taaiboschlaagte. By midday the enemy's offensive movements on the north and east were completely checked; but in the afternoon he advanced against our westerly positions, and supported by artillery fire from Mooifontein succeeded in effecting a lodgment on the Potgieter kopjes which formed the connecting positions between Dragoon Hill and the ridges covering the north-western angle of the British front. From these hills he was driven, apparently without much difficulty, by the 2nd Worcester Regiment, which advanced for that purpose from the camp west of the railway. The end of the day saw the enemy repulsed at every point. The losses on our side, and probably also on that of the Boers, were insignificant.

The next days were occupied in driving the enemy from the Mooifontein Hills on our left flank. On the 22nd Colonel Henderson with a squadron of the Inniskillings and two guns moved south-west to establish communication with Colonel Price, who was in command of the 2nd Victorian Contingent at Hanover Road. This was effected without difficulty, and next day the two officers moved northwards against the Mooifontein position, while other troops under Major Butcher co-operated from the Potgeiter's kopjes, and the 5-inch gun shelled Vaal Kop and Kuilfontein. By nightfall the Mooifontein ridge was occupied by the outflanking troops, the enemy slowly retiring to the northward.

Since his arrival at Arundel General Clements had been reinforced by two companies of regular mounted infantry,[1] four companies of local mounted volunteers,[2] and the 2nd Field Battery; and now that Henderson's movement had come on a level with his main position

[1] Belonging to the West Riding Regiment and Oxfordshire Light Infantry.

[2] Including detachments of the Prince Alfred's Guard, Eastern Province Horse, and Uitenhage Rifles.

he decided to attack the enemy's right in force and without delay. On the morning of February 24th, with the greater part of his artillery,[1] the mounted troops of Henderson and Price, the Bedfordshire Regiment, and the newly-arrived Volunteers, he advanced on a front of over twelve miles long against the Boer positions on the west of the railway. On the extreme left were the Inniskillings and J Battery, on their right the West Riding Mounted Infantry, and next to them Price with the 2nd Victorian Contingent, reinforced by a few Tasmanians and some of the Eastern Province Horse. These troops had orders to turn the enemy's right. The centre, which was to attack the main Boer positions south-west of Kuilfontein, consisted of the Bedfords, supported by the 2nd Field Battery and the heavy guns. The right was composed of the Volunteers under Captain Lascelles, and was strengthened by the 4th Field Battery and some men of the 1st Victorian and New South Wales Contingents. Two infantry battalions with the remainder of the mounted troops and the 39th Battery remained to hold the Arundel position.

Against the widespread horns of the British attack the enemy fought with their wonted stubbornness and skill in defence. In the centre, by the help of his superior artillery, Clements drove in their advanced posts and occupied them with infantry; but the open nature of the ground in front of their main position offered little prospect of success to the direct assault of a single battalion, and the Bedfords were not allowed to press home. On the left Henderson strove unsuccessfully to gain the Boer flank and take their position in reverse. By a very gallant attack, in which about fifteen men were killed and wounded, the West Riding Mounted Infantry company cleared the south-western end of the long Kuilfontein ridge which formed the main line of the defence, but the enemy quickly changed front, and when the mounted troops advanced to seize the kopjes in its rear they were sharply checked. Captain Cameron, of the Tasmanian company, was wounded and captured; a scouting party were cut off and practically destroyed, and in spite of further efforts nightfall found the new

[1] J Battery R.H.A., 2nd and 4th R.F.A., two 5-inch howitzers, and two 5-inch guns. The only battery which did not take part in the operation was the 39th.

positions of the enemy still intact. The gathering darkness and a tremendous thunderstorm greatly increased the difficulty of collecting the scattered units; and midnight was long passed before some of the troops, shivering with wet and cold, reached their bivouacs.

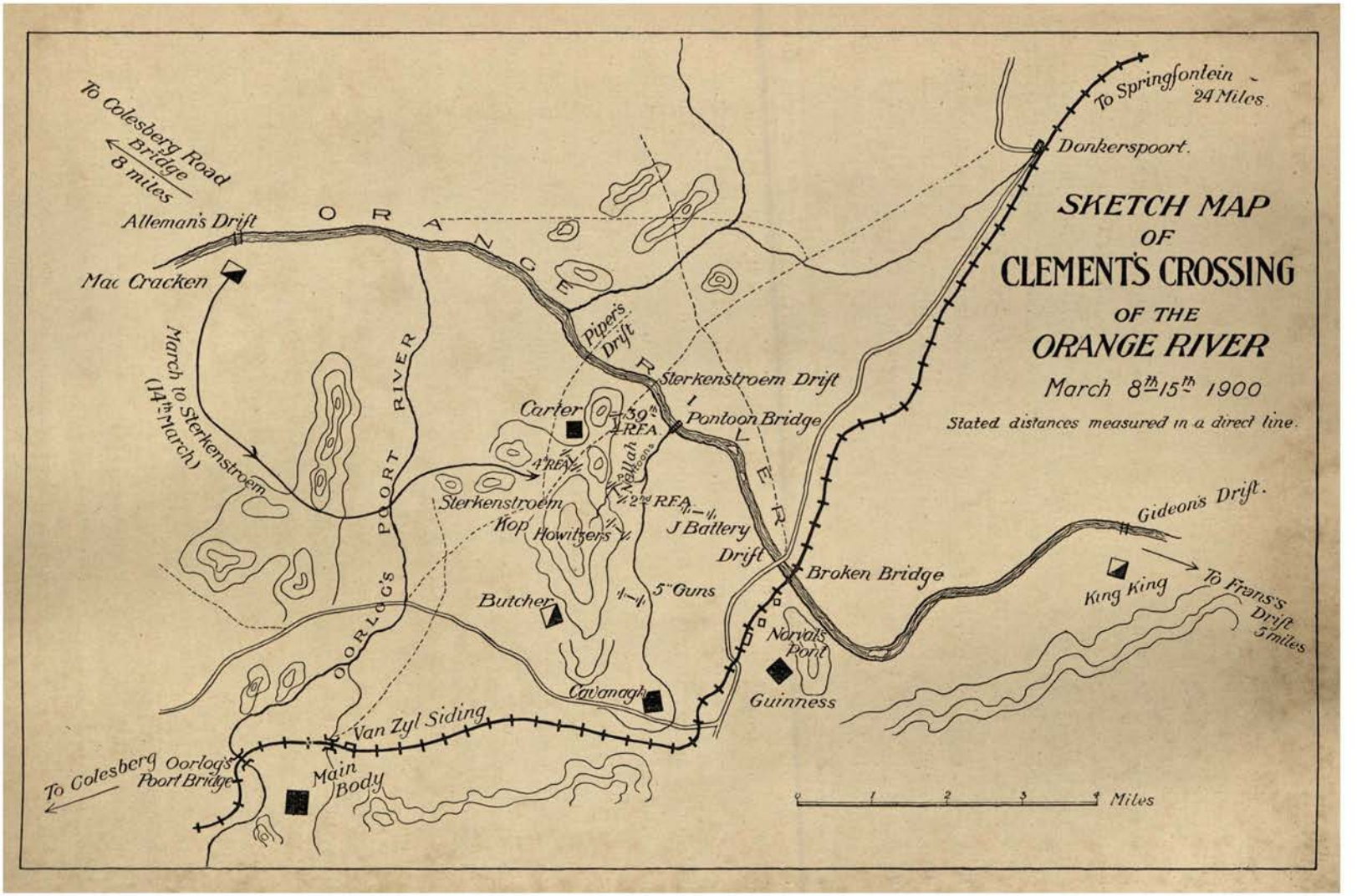
The right attack had achieved no better success. At 6 a.m. General Clements, in the hope that the Boers would be obliged to retire on Colesberg, had sent Lascelles forward down a shallow valley between Vaal Kop and Kuilfontein Farm to intercept their retreat. These points were at first but weakly held by the enemy; and Lascelles advanced with his Volunteers to a point on the right front of the Bedfords, between a stone wall extending from the farm to Vaal Kop and some low kopjes running towards the main Boer positions further to the south. But he had scarcely reached this spot when a strong body of the enemy, believed to be Zarps, accompanied by a pompom, rounded the northern shoulder of Vaal Kop and lined the wall, while another party occupied the kopjes on his left. He was obliged to take cover in a small water-course which ran along the centre of the valley, and for three-and-a-half hours maintained his position under a very heavy cross-fire from Mauser and pompom. At last, at 9.30 a.m., the enfilading fire of a Maxim compelled him to retire. Thanks to the excellent behaviour of the Volunteers this difficult operation was successfully accomplished, and the force regained the British lines with the loss of only ten men and twenty-five horses. For the rest of the day it furnished an escort to the 4th Field Battery, which, like the rest of the troops, did not get back to camp until late at night. The 2nd Field Battery was not so lucky. It lost its way in the storm, wandered during a considerable portion of the night, and at dawn found itself halted within a few hundred yards of the Boer lines. So dense was the obscurity and so tempestuous the night that it was a mere chance that it did not fall into the enemy's hands.

Although no direct success had been achieved, the fighting on the 24th of February was the last serious encounter that took place south of the Orange River. The arrival of Lord Kitchener, who on the 22nd had been sent from Paardeberg to hasten the occupation and repair of the Orange River bridges and to select the main line of the

army's future supply, practically coincided with the commencement of the Boer retreat. On the 25th nothing of importance was done; for the enemy appeared to be strengthening his defences, and the rain had rendered the country impassable for wheels. Next day reconnaissances proved that he had abandoned his more forward positions; but two scouts were wounded near Kuilfontein and Rensburg, and the Taaiboschlaagte was still held. On the 27th, however, strong parties under Major Butcher and Captain Maccleish advanced on these points, and by 4.30 p.m., after some desultory cannonading, reoccupied Vaalkop, the Taaiboschlaagte, and Rensburg, in which place was found a large quantity of clothing, camp furniture, provisions, and a few waggons. On the last day of February, hearing that the enemy had evacuated Colesberg, General Clements ordered a general advance. Early in the morning the main body encamped at Rensburg; by evening the advanced troops under Colonel Price[1] on the left and Major King-King on the right had reached respectively Maeder's and Jasfontein. Major Butcher in the centre halted for the night at Colesberg Junction. In the afternoon General Clements, with an escort of Inniskillings, made his formal entry into the town amidst the heartfelt rejoicings of the loyalists, who, for over twelve weeks had suffered the harshness of Boer administration. A construction train, with half of the Bedfordshire Regiment, advanced as far as Plewman's Siding, and immediately commenced to repair the few culverts which the enemy had blown up between that point and Colesberg. General Clements rode back to sleep at Rensburg.

It has been suggested that if the pursuit had that day been pushed beyond Colesberg a considerable amount of baggage, which the heavy state of the country had prevented the enemy from withdrawing behind the Orange River, would have been captured. Until more is known of the positions of the retreating Boers and of their numbers it is impossible to speak definitely on this question. But one thing at least seems certain: Clements never contemplated pursuit on a large scale. On the day of the occupation of Colesberg his advanced troops probably did not number more than 500 men, a totally inadequate

[1] Reinforced by half the Bedfordshire Regiment.


SKETCH MAP
OF
CLEMENT'S CROSSING
OF THE
ORANGE RIVER
March 8th-15th 1900
Stated distances measured in a direct line.
To Colesberg Road Bridge 8 miles
Alleman's Drift
Mac Cracken
March to Sterkenstroem (14th March)
ORANGE RIVER
OORLOG'S POORT RIVER
Piper's Drift
Sterkenstroem Drift
Pontoon Bridge
Carter
39th RFA
4th RFA
Nellah Hoons
2nd RFA
Sterkenstroem Kop
Howitzers
J Battery
Drift
5" Guns
Butcher
Cavanagh
Broken Bridge
Norvals Pont
Guinness
Van Zyl Siding
Main Body
To Colesberg Oorlog's Poort Bridge
To Springfontein 24 Miles
Donkerspoort.
Gideon's Drift.
King King
To Frans's Drift 5 miles
0 1 2 3 4 Miles

force with which to follow a far more numerous enemy into an extremely difficult country on the chance of capturing baggage. Had he really intended to pursue he would have made a forced march with his main body to Colesberg and pushed on his mounted troops until they came in touch with the Boer rearguard. Instead of this, he contented himself with occupying the points which the enemy left vacant; and neither on the 28th nor during his advance towards the Orange River did he attempt to hasten their retreat by an attack in force. For this policy, which would have been indefensible in the case of a large army following a beaten foe after a decisive battle, there were in the case in question very sufficient reasons. In the first place the retreat of the enemy had been due solely to the state of affairs on the Modder; for, as the events of February 12th–20th had proved, they were superior to Clements both in numbers and mobility. Not being disorganised by defeat, they were still capable of punishing very heavily any premature attempt upon their rear. In the second place, the country through which they were retiring presented many obstacles to an attacking force. The position of Auchtertang, whither their main body had retired, was in itself one of the strongest in South Africa, and any offensive stroke in that direction was always liable to be weakened and disconcerted by a Boer attack from the Colesberg road bridge, which flanked the Norval's Pont line of advance. Indeed, throughout the following days this risk of such an attack greatly impeded Clements's movements, for he was not strong enough to operate offensively in both directions at the same time, and he was obliged, as long as the enemy remained south of the road bridge or had not destroyed it, to detach a considerable part of his troops to cover Colesberg and his railway communication against a possible stroke from that quarter. Moreover, it must be remembered that his primary object was not the destruction of the enemy's force, but the opening of the new line of supply. A rapid advance to Norval's Pont was useful only so far as it accelerated that result. This was strictly conditioned by the rate of advance of the reconstruction train, for on the repair of the railway depended the conveyance of materials for the re-establishment of the bridges. A still more effective course would have been to save the

railway bridge by a *coup de main*, but the success of such an operation was doubtful even in the first days of February, when French's whole force was round Colesberg; and there seems no reason to think that it could have been usefully attempted by the reduced force at the disposal of Clements. However undesirable delay might be, nothing remained but to advance stage by stage with the repair of the railway, to bring up the material which the certain destruction of the bridge would render necessary, and risking nothing in the shape of tactical reverse, to trust to the development of affairs in the Free State to compel the withdrawal of the enemy to the northern bank.

For a day or two the main British force was stationary. The mounted troops, however, were pushed forward in a semicircle round the town. King-King with the Volunteers occupied Blue's Hill on the east; the West Australians held Jasfontein; Butcher with the Inniskillings, the 1st Victorian Contingent, and the New South Wales Mounted Infantry occupied the kopjes north of the Junction; McCracken with the 39th Battery and the half-battalion of Berkshires advanced to Grassy Hill. The 2nd Victorian Contingent remained at Maeder's while the Tasmanians patrolled as far as Rietfontein. On March 3rd a further advance took place. On the north, 200 Tasmanians and Victorians, under Captain Hamilton, reconnoitred along the waggon road and found that the enemy, after preparing the bridge for destruction, had retired to the northern bank. On the east, Major Butcher advanced beyond Auchtertang, and after driving in some Boer outposts, discovered the enemy in position three miles south of Norval's Pont. In the evening he fell back and occupied the Auchertang position. Next day Clements moved his main body to Joubert's Siding, leaving Colesberg in the charge of the 4th Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which had just reached the front. On the 5th a general advance took place. Clements with the main body occupied Auchtertang, where the broken bridge over the Spruit required extensive repairs. The 2nd Wiltshire Regiment was detached to occupy the hills north-west of the station. McCracken with the 39th Battery, his own half-battalion, and the 2nd Victorian Contingent pushed out along the Rietfontein Ridge to cover the left flank; on the

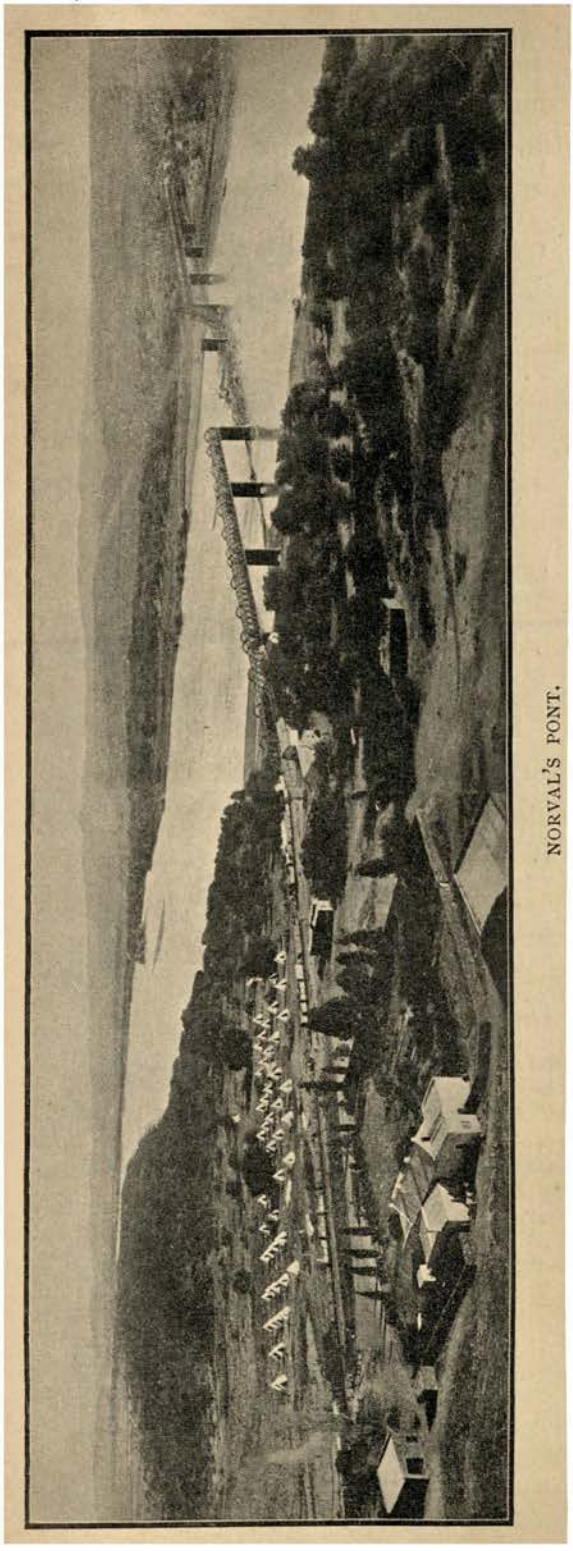
right King-King with the West Australians, Prince Alfred's Guards, the mounted company of Oxfordshire Light Infantry and two guns of J Battery occupied Kleintoren Hill, eight miles south-east of Auchtertang. Butcher with the 4th Field Battery, a squadron of the Inniskillings, the West Riding Mounted Infantry and 250 Australians covered the front of the main body.

In the course of the night the enemy abandoned their positions south of the river, and parties of Engineers, covered by strong patrols, were enabled to examine the broken bridge in front of Van Zyl Siding where the railway crossed the Oorlog Spruit and penetrated the last of the series of strong positions which lay between Colesberg and Norval's Pont. Although scouts had been sent out in the evening, it was not definitely known on the night of the 5th–6th that the enemy had crossed the Orange River. Had information of this reached headquarters in time, some attempt[1] would probably have been made to save the bridge, as was done at Bethulie a few days later. It would have been a mere chance if it had succeeded. The bridge was already mined and prepared for firing by electricity, and the alertness of the enemy rendered a surprise, which alone offered a chance of success, almost impossible.[2] As it was, nothing of the kind took place. On the following morning, before the English scouts arrived within sight of the river, three spans of the great structure were blown up, and all hope of an uninterrupted line of supply was gone. Butcher bivouacked within three miles of the south bank, pushing a party of Australians closer to the bridge during the night.

In order to establish a temporary means of communication pending the restoration of the permanent structure, Clements had now to master the northern bank of the great frontier stream with the least possible delay. On the 7th, escorted by Butcher's troops, who took up a position confronting the shattered bridge, he reconnoitred the course of the river in person; and on the 8th, although the broken spans at

[1] Such an attempt might have been made from Kleintoren had sufficient troops been available.

[2] The two bridges saved at Bethulie and Aliwal North were road bridges; had they been railway bridges, it is most unlikely that they would have escaped destruction.



NORVAL'S PONT.

Oorlog's Poort still delayed the arrival of his pontoons, he took the step which must generally precede the passage of a river in face of the enemy, by occupying all the important points of crossing for some distance up and down stream.[1] On the extreme left McCracken advanced to Alleman's Drift, nine miles to the west; in the centre Butcher remained on the hills in front of Norval's Pont; on the right King-King marched to Gideon's Drift and Frans' Drift, five and ten miles respectively to the east. The screen of mounted men was thickened by bodies of infantry at intermediate points. Lieut.-Colonel Carter with the Wiltshire Regiment occupied Sterkenstroem's Drift, three miles below Norval's Pont. Lieut.-Colonel Cavanagh with half the Bedfordshire Regiment and four 5-inch guns worked by the 36th company of the Royal Garrison Artillery encamped near Butcher, in the gorge whence the railway emerges on the river bank. Lieut.-Colonel Guinness with four companies of the Royal Irish Regiment and the South Australians was stationed

[1] See sketch-map of the crossing of the Orange River, p. 488.

in front of Cavanagh at Norval's Pont Station. The stream was running five feet deep at all the drifts, and together with the cordon of troops effectively screened Clements's movements.

On March 9th the Engineers, who throughout did their work with remarkable speed and thoroughness, finished the repairs at Oorlog's Poort; and the first pontoon train and the ammunition column were brought up to Van Zyl. All this time sniping was going on along the bank; and throughout the 10th there was a good deal of long-range firing. But it was known that the main body of the enemy had fallen back to Donkerspoort and in the course of the day their right wing abandoned Alleman's Drift and the waggon bridge as well. At 8 p.m. that costly structure, which in the days before the Bloemfontein railway had been the main means of communication with the Free State, was at last blown up; and all fears of a counter attack upon Colesberg and the railway were at an end. Strategically the destruction of this fine bridge was a mistake. To the British its possession was of little importance, and while intact it gave the Boers the power of most effectively delaying the operations in front of Norval's Pont. So ended the four months' hostile occupation of the district of Colesberg.

On the 11th all was quiet, and on the next day a general demonstration along Clements's front, in which the bulk of the British [1] Artillery took part, drew but a feeble reply.[2] Receding dust-clouds on the northern roads indicated a general retreat; and it became more and more certain that only a weak rearguard remained to dispute the passage. Nevertheless, General Clements was determined to run no risks. His dispositions for the passage are interesting as a good example of the way to cross a river; and furnish the only instance of a really considerable operation of this kind that occurred in the course of the war.

Trusting to the feints of the 12th, which had been specially directed against Sterkenstroem's Drift, to divert the enemy's attention to the ordinary points of passage,[3] he had chosen his point of crossing about

[1] J Battery, R.H.A., 2nd, 4th, and 39th R.F.A., four 5-inch guns, and a newly-arrived howitzer battery.

[2] According to Commandant Runck the Boers were in full retreat on March 12th.

[3] There were numerous drifts on this part of the river, many of them insecure by reason of sand-banks.

half a mile above Sterkenstroem, where the banks were overgrown by a thick belt of bushes and trees, and where a ravine running into the river-bed offered a means of concealing the pontoons. A line of hills in rear covered the more distant approaches, and offered a series of artillery positions from which a converging fire could be brought to bear on the further side of the river, whose high scrub-covered margin hid the course of the stream from any one on the kopjes behind. Concealed by the ten-feet deep nullah, parties of men worked day and night preparing its bed for the passage of the pontoons. These together with a supply of casks, which were brought up in case the former proved untrustworthy—a fortunate precaution, for eight of them sank as soon as they were launched[1]—were collected at Lieut.-Colonel Carter's camp in rear of the Sterkenstroem kopjes, and brought down the covered way under shelter of darkness. On the night of the 14th–15th they were hidden in the thick vegetation of the bank at points previously selected for launching. The Worcester Regiment and McCracken's half-battalion of the Berkshires, all under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Hacket-Pain, lay near them ready to embark at the given signal. At the same time the entire Artillery, with the exception of two guns of J Battery under Major King-King, took position on the ridges to the southward, its front being covered by the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment; while the 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment took extended order along the bank above the chosen point of crossing.

Punctually at 5.30 a.m. the first eight pontoons pushed off and were rowed across by selected crews. Others quickly followed, and by 6.40 the whole of the covering force had landed and seized the high ground on the opposite bank. The bridge-building was begun at once, and but for the failure of the last eight pontoons would have been ended by 10 a.m. This accident necessitated the building of cask piers to complete the bridge, a process which entailed over six hours' delay, and, had the enemy disputed the passage, might have proved disastrous. Fortunately no hostile interruption took place. At

[1] These pontoons had for years been used for purposes of instruction at Chatham and Aldershot. The demand for pontoons on the Modder and in Natal had been considerable, and owing to insufficiency of reserves at home no more new ones were available.

4.30 p.m. the bridge was completed, and before dark the bulk of the mounted troops, two batteries of artillery, and two-and-a-half battalions had crossed, and had occupied without opposition the kopjes covering the bridge-head and the broken bridge at Norval's Pont. The length of the pontoon bridge was 266 yards,[1] the longest built by the British Army since the Peninsular War; the depth of the stream where the cask piers were used was eight feet. The work was performed by the 47th Company and the Pontoon troop of the Royal Engineers, under the direction of Colonel Rochford Boyd. Later reconnaissances showed that the enemy had dug shelter-trenches covering all the drifts, but none in front of the actual point of crossing.

Next morning no Boers were visible, and in the course of the day the arrival of trains carrying General Pole-Carew with two battalions of Guards from Bloemfontein proved that General Clements's task—a task in its way as difficult and anxious as that of any subordinate commander in South Africa—had been successfully accomplished, and that the communication with the Free State capital was secured. Between the 16th and 19th his remaining troops crossed the river, and fourteen days' supplies, sufficient to enable his columns to reach Bloemfontein, were collected at the bridge-head. On March 20th he began his march, and, passing through Philippolis, Jagersfontein, Fauresmith, Koffyfontein, and Petrusberg, arrived at Bloemfontein on April 4th. When he left the Orange River the pontoon bridge was broken up and re-established close to the railway bridge, across which in the meantime supplies for Lord Roberts's army had been carried by the slow and insufficient method of a hawser and trolley. Not until March 29th was it possible to re-establish regular railway communication with the southern bank and commence the accumulation of a large reserve of stores at Bloemfontein.[2]

While Clements was slowly advancing to Norval's Pont, the eastern

[1] This must have absorbed over forty pontoons, exclusive of those which sank.

[2] Mr. Price, Chief Traffic Manager of the Cape Government Railways, stated before the Commission appointed to inquire into the care and treatment of the sick and wounded (5637) that it had been expected that the communication would have been restored much earlier. Mr. Elliot, General Manager, spoke of "unforeseen difficulties" (5609), but gave no details as to their nature. It will be remembered that the materials had been prepared for the restoration of the bridges before Lord Roberts's movement commenced.

columns had reassumed the offensive towards Bethulie and Aliwal North. Early in February we left Sir William Gatacre holding the mountains north and north-east of Sterkstroom, and in communication with French and Kelly-Kenny's posts at Steynsburg and Thebus. Lord Roberts, in his letter of January 19th, which formed part of a series of documents ordering the maintenance of a waiting attitude in the Colony until his own operations had taken effect, had directed him to remain strictly on the defensive until the advance of Brabant's Colonial Division to Jamestown had weakened the enemy's hold on Stormberg and the country between that point and the Orange River. The organisation of such a force had, as we have seen,[1] been one of Lord Roberts's first objects; and early in February its formation was sufficiently advanced to enable it to take the field. On February 10th General Brabant himself arrived at Penhoek where the available corps were already concentrated; and five days later he began his movement upon Dordrecht. The Colonial Division then amounted to about 1,800 men,[2] accompanied by four guns of the 79th Battery, two short naval 12-pounders, two 7-pounders belonging to the Cape Mounted Rifles, one 13-pounder, the gift of Mr. Alfred Beit to the 2nd Regiment of Brabant's Horse, and a detachment of Royal Engineers. Later on, during the halt at Dordrecht, it was reinforced by the newly-raised Border Horse, by nearly 500 recruits belonging to the Kaffrarian Mounted Rifles and by three companies of the 1st Royal Scots, so that its effective strength at the beginning of March amounted to about 2,700 men. For its supply it depended entirely on ox-waggons, General Brabant preferring this form of transport to the more mobile but less trustworthy mule.

Recognising Gatacre's weakness in mounted troops, Roberts seems at the time of the formation of the Colonial Division to have contemplated placing Brabant directly under his orders; but in the event

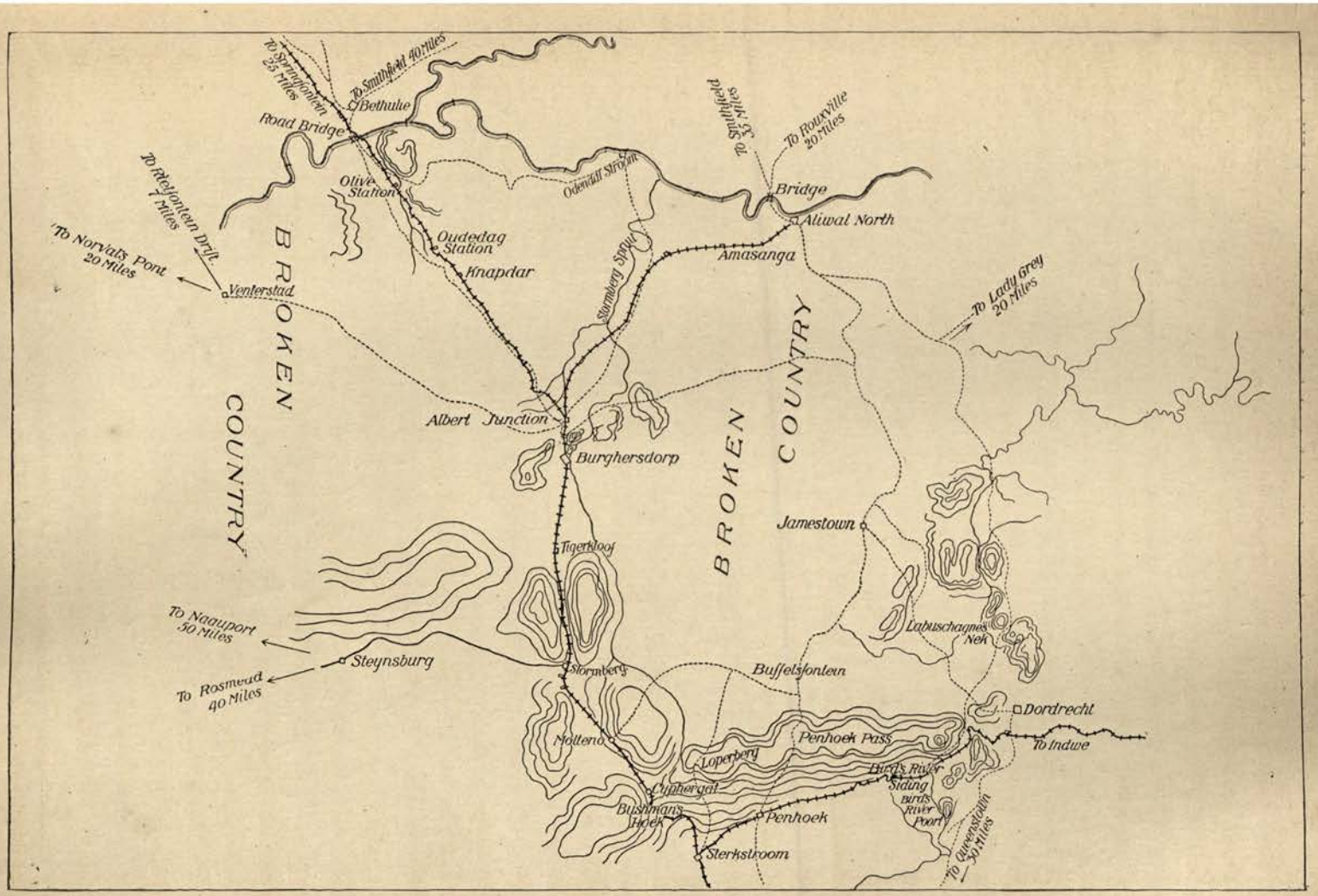
[1] See Chapter VI.

[2] Viz.:

1st and 2nd Brabant's Horse	1,079
Frontier M.R.	145
Queenstown M.R.	96
Kaffrarian M.R.	60
Cape M.R....	497
	1,877

Brabant exercised a totally independent command; and although the two columns occasionally communicated with each other, no co-operation in the strict sense of the word appears to have taken place. This arrangement, which is presumably attributable to a desire to satisfy Colonial susceptibilities and for which the wide interval separating Bushman's Hoek from Dordrecht offers some practical explanation, can scarcely have proved satisfactory. Apart from this question, it is also fair to remember, in view of the cautious policy pursued by General Gatacre, that although the advantage of placing a strong mobile column on the exposed flank rightly outweighed every other consideration, the offensive power of his own column was greatly crippled by the withdrawal of so many of his mounted men. About three-fifths of the Colonial Division was made up of corps which had previously worked under his own command and had helped to reinforce his defensive line; and their absence must have been severely felt when the moment arrived for the advance into the difficult country around and beyond Stormberg. For instance, a rapid march upon the excellent ford of Rietfontein, half-way between Norval's Pont and Bethulie, was rendered impracticable by the want of mounted troops. The passage of the Orange River at this point had been a favourite project with General French; and had it been attempted by a sufficiently strong force, it is certain that the retirement of the enemy from Colesberg would have been greatly accelerated. Gatacre's force was further weakened by the withdrawal of four companies of mounted infantry, which were transferred to the Modder. By the middle of February the only mounted men remaining with him were Montmorency's Scouts, a few Cape Police, one company of mounted infantry belonging to the Berkshire regiment, and the newly-raised 10th Regiment of Mounted Infantry, which, like their comrades at Modder River, was untrained and imperfectly equipped. The infantry of his column was composed of the 1st Derbyshire Regiment, 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers, 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, four companies of the 1st Royal Scots, and three companies of the Berkshires, a strength of about three-and-a-half battalions;[1] for all the corps were weakened by the absorption of 120 of

[1] Another regiment of mounted infantry was raised on March 7th, thus further weakening the infantry by half a battalion.



SKETCH TO ILLUSTRATE THE OPERATIONS OF GATACRE AND BRABANT.

their best men in the mounted infantry companies. The artillery consisted of the 74th and 77th Batteries, two guns of the 79th,[1] four 7-pounders[2] and two naval 12-pounders. At the time of Brabant's movement to Dordrecht the force was distributed in the manner that has already been described,[3] the main body in front and in rear of Bushman's Hoek with detachments at Bird's River Siding and Penhoek.

In spite of rain that rendered the country almost impassable, Brabant's first march from Penhoek was a rapid one. Leaving behind his ox-transport, tents, baggage and food, he reached by nightfall a point six miles west of Dordrecht. On the next morning (February 16th), he advanced against a commando of about 600 men and two guns which had taken up a position north of the main chain of hills and about four miles from the town. At 9 a.m. Colonel Grenfell, commanding the 2nd Brabant's Horse, moved out with his own regiment, the Queenstown Volunteers, some of the Cape Mounted Rifles and two guns to reconnoitre; and soon came in touch with the enemy, who occupied a gully on his left and some low hills in his front. The British guns came into action on an isolated kopje which had been occupied by one of the advanced squadrons, and a smart skirmish began, the enemy trying to turn Grenfell's position by way of the gully, and the British reinforcing their left with successive squadrons from both regiments of Brabant's Horse as the Boers extended their front of attack. Apparently the enemy threatened to turn the right as well, for at about 2 p.m. the Cape Mounted Rifles were sent to cover that flank. The fighting in that quarter was, however, slight. Later in the afternoon the attack by the gully was effectively met by Captain Bettelheim, who, with his own squadron of Brabant's Horse and two 7-pounders, drove the enemy back, and by nightfall secured the position. When morning broke the enemy were seen retreating through Dordrecht and towards Labuschagne's Nek, and with an artillery duel over the town the fighting ceased. Next day the headquarters of the division occupied Dordrecht, but, probably out of consideration for the troops, made no attempt to follow the enemy. The force had suffered fifteen casualties

[1] At Penhoek.

[2] Two 7-pounders at Penhoek; two at Bird's River.

[3] See p. 215 *et seq.*

in the course of the fight of the 16th, and though the newly-organised corps had fought well, the men were considerably exhausted. Moreover, the food supply[1] was insufficient; and as the whole of the transport had been left behind at Penhoek, a halt had to be made to allow it time to rejoin the division. To these various deficiencies of equipment or supply, and to the fact that some of the last detachments of recruits had not joined the division, must be ascribed the fortnight's halt that followed the reoccupation of Dordrecht. With the exception of occasional affairs of outposts no fighting took place during this period; and no attempt was made to drive the enemy from his position at Labuschagne's Nek.

In face of the renewed immobility of the British forces, the Boers made a last spasmodic attempt upon our positions. Knowing that the Penhoek garrison had been reduced, Van Arndt descended from Stormberg upon that point on the morning of the 19th with 700 men and two guns, and, in the hope that the field guns had gone with Brabant, occupied the ridge which commanded the pass.[2] But Lieut.-Colonel Morgan-Payler, who was in command, was ready for an attack, and had no difficulty in repulsing the enemy. The prompt and accurate service of the two guns of the 79th Battery prevented their artillery from coming into action, and by 8.30 a.m. they were retiring under the fire of the Cape Mounted Rifles and half a company of the 1st Royal Scots. On the same day an equally weak attack on Bird's River Siding was repulsed with almost equal ease. No doubt here, as at Colesberg, the enemy were feeling the pressure of Roberts's advance. What their numbers were at this time it is very difficult to say. On the 18th their principal laagers at Stormberg probably contained 2,400 burghers.[3] In the eastern districts not a few of the enemy were thought to be retiring across Governor's Drift from Lady Grey and Barkly East; and it was known that Major Hcok and Captain Penny, with

[1] Fourteen hundred sheep and cattle were brought in by the Cape Mounted Rifles in the course of February 17th.

[2] See Chapter IX., p. 214.

[3] Later on captured telegrams to and from local Landrosts and Olivier, the Boer Commandant, showed that at this time a great deal of desertion was going on among his rebel allies.

parties of volunteers, were contemplating an advance upon Herschel and Lundean's Nek. Other reports, again, pointed to a reinforcement of the commandoes facing Brabant at Jamestown. So uncertain and contradictory were these various statements that Gatacre, who was anxiously watching for the first sign of weakness or of retreat, resolved to try whether a reconnaissance in force would not clear up the situation.

At dawn on February 23rd he sent forward De Montmorency with his scouts, a few Cape Police and four newly-formed companies of Mounted Infantry to Molteno, supporting them with ten field guns and the armoured train under Lieutenant Gosset. The Derbyshire Regiment was brought up by train to the same point; and the whole force then advanced along the railway, Montmorency pushing on ahead with about thirty scouts. No signs of the enemy were visible until the armoured train arrived within long artillery range of the Rooi Kop. At this point it was brought to a halt by shells from that hill; and the field batteries came into action to reply. At the same time small parties of Boers were observed descending from the surrounding kopjes; and the Mounted Infantry were pushed forward in the hope of drawing the enemy into the open Seeing the Mounted Infantry moving up, De Montmorency, who had occupied a low kopje on Gatacre's right front, jumped to the conclusion that the General was about to attack the Stormberg position, and with characteristic promptitude galloped off to a small isolated eminence still further forward. His men dismounted, and had just reached its crest when a number of Boers, who had climbed its opposite flank, appeared within a few yards of them. Both parties dropped down amongst the rocks, and a deadly rifle duel ensued. Neither side could get away without exposing itself to the enemy's fire, and for six hours the men lay scattered amongst the boulders snap-shooting at anything that they saw move. But the daring leader of the scouts was not satisfied with this, and about 11 a.m. he and Major Hoskier started to creep round to a small knoll on the right in the hope of enfilading their opponents. As they crawled down a watercourse they came within view of several of the enemy, and were shot dead immediately. Hoskier, who appears to have been taken for De Montmorency, was struck by no less than seven bullets. When, after the fight, De Montmorency's body was re-

covered, his uniform was without buttons or accoutrements. These trophies the Boers had carried off in memory of their dreaded opponent. Young as he was and brief and comparatively bloodless as his campaign had been, his fearless resolution, daring to the verge of recklessness, had received the swift recognition which that particular quality never fails to claim from friends and from foes. A born leader of irregulars, tireless and enterprising, quick to judge the intentions and strength of the enemy, and ever ready to undertake any service however dangerous, he was one of those officers who have a value out of all proportion to their rank, and who so often meet their death through the exercise of those very qualities which make them so hard to spare.

Throughout the day the remainder of the mounted troops were engaged with other bodies of the enemy, and could send no help to the Scouts, while the artillery dared not shell the kopje for fear of harming their own men. Several messages seem to have been sent ordering them to retire; but the ground between them and their horses was swept with fire, and to fly seemed more dangerous than to stay. To make matters worse, Lieutenant Hockley, De Montmorency's second in command, had been blinded by a bullet. At last, at about 4 p.m., the little party made a dash for safety and got away unscathed. The enemy, who feared the shrapnel fire which would follow the retreat of the British, bolted at the same moment in the opposite direction without waiting to fire a shot. The Scouts had lost, besides the three officers, five men killed and four wounded. On their withdrawal Gatacre ordered a general retirement to Bushman's Hoek.

The reconnaissance showed that the Stormberg force had been reduced in men and guns, and on the following day General Gatacre was able to transfer the greater part of the garrison[1] of Bird's River Siding to a strong entrenched position south of Dordrecht, thus meeting the wish which Lord Roberts had expressed on January 19th that the town should as soon as possible be secured against attack. But he considered the enemy still too strong to justify an advance upon Stormberg, especially as no help was as yet to be expected from Brabant; and for

[1] The force despatched was two companies of the 1st Royal Scots, two 7-pounder guns, a few Cape Police, and a party of signallers.

over another week he was unable to adopt the suggestion of Lord Kitchener, then with Clements at Arundel, that he should make his weight felt and so facilitate the advance on Norval's Pont. His movement did not begin until Lord Roberts's march obliged the enemy to retreat. As in the case of Clements, this was the primary cause of the clearing of the northern districts of the Colony.

Cronje's surrender was no doubt the deciding cause of the enemy's withdrawal from Stormberg, but their retreat could not but have been accelerated by the news from Jamestown. At midnight on March 3rd General Brabant began his advance with the main body of the Colonial Division and three companies of the 1st Royal Scots, and at 4 a.m. on the 4th arrived within two miles of Labuschagne's Nek. The enemy, whose strength is variously stated at between 800 and 1,500 men, including rebels, and two or three guns, had fortified the hills on both sides of the pass. Their front was, as usual, one of considerable extent, and appears to have run in a semicircle from the south round to the north-west and west, its further extremity resting on the road to Jamestown, which could not be reached until they had been driven from the hills to the eastward. General Brabant therefore decided to contain the Boer centre by a frontal attack in the neighbourhood of the Nek, and to turn the right of their position by an outflanking movement from the westward. The Xalanga Rifles and the three companies of the Royal Scots were detailed for the first-named service, the two regiments of Brabant's Horse, Cape Mounted Rifles, Cape Police, Kaffrarian Mounted Rifles, and Queenstown Volunteers for the second. The artillery were to prepare the attack from positions in rear of the centre.[1]

[1] The descriptions of the Boer position and of the action itself are very vague. The pass was the same as that near which De Montmorency's skirmish took place at the end of December (see Chapter IX.), but the extent of ground embraced by the flanking movement was very much greater. So far as we have been able to ascertain, the road which passed over the Nek was not the one which led to Jamestown. This ran along a hollow some five miles to the west. But the hill range commanded the Jamestown road, and it was impossible to leave the enemy, many of whom seem to have been based on Lady Grey, in a position to attack the flank of the march. Brabant's attack was directed against the right or northern wing of the enemy's line. That occupied, the Boer lines of retreat to the north and east would be threatened, and their left or southern

The attack on the Nek was the first to develop, and soon after dawn the Xalanga Rifles were within 1,200 yards of the position. Here, however, they were checked by a heavy fire, and two companies of the Royal Scots were sent forward with orders to take the pass. In successive lines of sections, each 300 or 400 yards apart, the regulars pushed steadily on and cleared it. Arrived on the Nek, however, they found themselves under a heavy fire from the flanking kopjes, and although Captain Wingate, followed by a portion of his men, made a gallant effort to clear the conical hill on the right or southern side, he was forced to take cover when within 400 yards of the top. For six hours the party held on, but no help came from the left, and in the afternoon they retired on the main body of the Royal Scots, one man at a time running back under the cover of the fire of the others. The two companies remained on the Nek all night.

The turning movement had not entirely succeeded. The western extremity of the ridge was found unoccupied, the hostile outposts having gone away to sleep, and some sangars in this part of the position were cleared by a party of the Border Horse under Lieutenant Schreiber; but the enemy opposed a further advance with great stubbornness, and even attempted a counter attack upon the captured works, which was repulsed. A long-fire fight ensued, the Boers bringing two 15-pounders into action on the left of the Nek, and meeting every attempt to press further along the ridge with a heavy rifle fire. Two gallant attempts made by Major Sprenger of the Cape Mounted Rifles to seize another fort were driven back at point-blank range; and in spite of the efforts of the rest of the force it was late in the day when another portion of his corps, aided by Maxim fire, and supported by the 1st Brabant's Horse under Major Henderson and

wing obliged to retire. If this view of the situation is correct the outflanking force had to clear some miles of broken country before the enemy could be driven from the kopjes on the north of the pass, and to push out parties to cover its own left or outer flank while the movement was in progress. A considerable time, therefore, had to elapse before the flank attack could develop. By the time that it had been completed the British line would be facing east and south-east. Probably the outflanking troops moved along the valley by which De Montmorency retired on the night on which Milford's party were left behind. The War Office map of the district is on too small a scale to represent the details of the field of combat, and is probably inaccurate even in the larger features.

Captain Cholmondely, succeeded in turning the enemy's flank and driving them from their position. The fire of the guns of the 79th Battery played a considerable part in this success. By nightfall Brabant's troops seem to have established themselves firmly on the hills north of the Nek, thus threatening the Boer line of retreat. The British success, which cost forty-two men killed and wounded, was very largely due to the resolution and skill of Major Maxwell of the Royal Engineers.[1]

Next morning (5th) the enemy were found to have abandoned most of their positions; but they had not retired far, and more sharp fighting took place before it was seen that their main body was retreating. By 2 p.m. the rearward movement, which was covered by the fire of their artillery, became general, and in the course of the afternoon parties sent in pursuit captured a laager containing a few rifles and ammunition. No further attempt at resistance seems to have taken place; and by nightfall the enemy had disappeared in the direction of Aliwal North. The conquered positions were occupied, and those troops which had borne the brunt of the fighting were withdrawn to Dordrecht. Once again the division appears to have suffered from want of transport and supplies, for no movement took place on the 6th. However, the road to Jamestown was reported clear on the 7th, and the place was occupied on the 8th. On the same day it became known that the enemy were in retreat all along the frontier, and that the rebels were surrendering their arms.

On the 10th General Brabant resumed his advance, and next day, after a rapid march, his advanced guard sighted Aliwal North. Boer tents were visible on the northern bank of the river; but Major Henderson, trusting to the effect of a surprise, pushed on through the town and saved the bridge by galloping boldly across it. The enemy, who were very superior in numbers, now endeavoured to drive the Colonials from the northern bank, and some very sharp fighting followed; but the attack was repulsed, and at nightfall Henderson's men were entrenched in positions covering the approaches to the bridge. The detachment which performed this fine feat only numbered 250 men. The casualties amounted to nearly twenty.

[1] The same officer who was afterwards the mainstay of the defence of Wepener.

On the morning of March 12th, though the laager had disappeared, the enemy were still in position, but the arrival of the rest of the division ensured the safety of the detachment on the northern bank, and in the course of the day they were relieved by fresh troops. On the 13th fighting commenced afresh. The enemy brought two guns into action against the British left, and again endeavoured to turn it, but were repulsed. It was their last effort. Lord Roberts's entry into Bloemfontein, combined with the collapse of the rebellion, made it impossible for them to remain longer on the Orange River, and by the 15th they had disappeared in the direction of Rouxville.

We must now return to General Gatacre, whom we left at Bushman's Hoek. On Friday, March 2nd, a reconnaissance towards Stormberg found the enemy still in position; but on the evening of the 3rd, the day before Brabant attacked Labuschagne's Nek and three days after Cronje's surrender, news that the enemy was preparing to retreat was brought in by scouts and confirmed by advices from Capetown. The British Commander was urged to advance at once, but mindful, no doubt, of his earlier experience of Stormberg, he preferred to wait until he could be sure that the reports were true; and on the 4th (Sunday) he contented himself with observing the enemy with De Montmorency's Scouts, now commanded by his aide-de-camp, Captain McNeill. During the night of the 4th–5th Stormberg was evacuated by the enemy; and at 10 a.m. on Monday (5th) McNeill, accompanied by the Scouts and some Cape Police, reached the still burning fires of the laagers of the preceding evening. That day Stormberg itself was occupied by a battalion of infantry, four mounted infantry companies, and two field batteries, and repairs on the railway were begun. On the 6th McNeill advanced through the defile of Tigerkloof and occupied Burghersdorp without firing a shot. On the 7th he received personal orders from Gatacre, who had reached Burghersdorp in the course of the day, to advance towards Knapdaar and get in touch with the Boers. Starting on the 8th with only 30 men, he followed close upon the enemy's track all day, and not coming up with them at Knapdaar, pushed on again. He marched through the greater portion of the night, and after covering a distance of 45 miles,

reached at 1.30 a.m. a ridge within a mile of the Bethulie bridges. At dawn on the 9th a large party of the enemy were seen leisurely preparing for their demolition, but the scouts dare not show themselves for fear they should hasten the act of destruction, nor were they strong enough to risk an attack. Their caution was in vain, for at 4.30 p.m. the railway bridge was blown up. The road bridge, however, was still intact, and at dusk the arrival of the remainder of the Scouts with spare horses made possible an attempt to save it. A feint under the cover of darkness, which concealed the small remainder of the assailants, scared the enemy off the bridge. At 10 p.m. Major Neylan came up with some Cape Police, and a joint attack was agreed upon; and at daybreak (10th) Holm's Farm, which completely commanded the bridge, was successfully occupied by a mixed party of Police and Scouts. Here they held on under a constant sniping fire until 5 o'clock in the afternoon, when the exhausted men were relieved by some of Gatacre's Mounted Infantry, who had arrived during the day with part of the field artillery. McNeill's march with 30 men from Burghersdorp to Bethulie through a country peculiarly suited to ambush or surprise, his 40 hours' vigil within rifle-shot of a very superior enemy, and his advance upon the bridge furnish a good instance of what can be done by the smallest detachments, if energetically led, when once the enemy is really on the run.

Throughout the 11th fighting continued round the bridge; but the Boers, who had already mined it, could find no opportunity to approach its northern end and connect the electric wires by which the dynamite was to be fired.[1] At noon the Royal Scots Mounted Infantry Company and the Cape Police at Holm's Farm were relieved by two Companies of the Derbyshires. That night, assisted by four men of that regiment Lieutenant Popham carried some boxes of dynamite off the bridge under a sharp fire; and a little later Captain Grant of the Royal Engineers crawled out along the roadway, removed the wires and detonators, and descending through the manholes, managed to throw into the river the dynamite which had been placed on the

[1] In his despatch of March 11th, General Gatacre attributes the safety of the bridge to defective fuses.

piers. By these gallant services the safety of the bridge was practically ensured; and the advance of Gatacre's main body could now be awaited without anxiety.

Slow as its movements must have seemed to the small detachments in front, they had in reality been rapid even to the verge of precipitation. On March 7th Gatacre had occupied Burghersdorp, 35 miles from Bushman's Hoek, with the mass of his infantry, bringing up the troops, when possible, by rail. On March 11th he telegraphed to Lord Roberts that the railway as far as Knapdaar, 30 miles in front of Burghersdorp, and 16 from Bethulie, was open. Next day all his mounted troops, his artillery, and the Derbyshire Regiment[1] were within supporting distance of McNeill, and the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles were at Olive Siding. The 1st Royal Scots, which, after concentrating at Sterkstroom on the 7th, had marched to Klipbankfontein, three miles south of Bethulie, on the 11th, had been sent back to Burghersdorp.[2] Here they entrained, and reached Olive Siding, eight miles south of Bethulie, at 12.30 a.m. on the 13th. The 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers were further in rear. The headquarters were nominally at Burghersdorp, but the Staff seem to have been a good deal scattered at this time, part of it being employed in pushing the troops up from Burghersdorp and part being in front with General Gatacre. The repair of the railway, which was performed with remarkable speed by the 12th Company of Royal Engineers, was a work of great difficulty. All along the 70 to 80 miles of line between Molteno and the Orange River breakages had been frequent. South of Knapdaar double and treble culverts had been blown in; and the Stormberg Spruit Bridge, a massive stone structure with piers from 36 to 50 feet high on the branch line to Aliwal North, in itself important as the principal means of supplying Brabant, was entirely destroyed. To make

[1] The 1st Derbyshire Regiment had been obliged to detrain at Ondag Siding, owing to the breaking of the culverts.

[2] From Sterkstroom to Klipbankfontein is nearly 90 miles. If the Royal Scots covered all this distance on foot, their marches must have averaged 18 miles a day. Why, having reached Klipbankfontein, they were sent back to Burghersdorp we are unable to say. The difficulty of supplying so many troops at Olive Siding may account for the movement.

matters worse, the heavy baulks of timber which were necessary for the temporary repair of these demolitions, were very hard to obtain; and all the rolling stock north of Sterkstroom had been removed by the enemy. It was through no ordinary exertions that by the morning of the 13th the Engineers under Major Thomson had opened the main line up to the broken piers of Bethulie railway bridge; and that by the night of the 16th the branch line to Aliwal had been made available for light traffic.

On March 13th a good deal of firing, from gun as well as rifle, took place. The enemy made his presence felt for some miles along the bank, and parties were reported as far west as Rietfontein Drift. General Gatacre was in an embarrassing position; for Holm's Farm and the bridge were unapproachable by day, the Boers commanded all the drifts, and as he had the pontoon equipment of only one field company,[1] there was no question of crossing the stream anywhere but at the fords. Hence he was obliged to wait until the British occupation of Bloemfontein had rendered the position of the Boers on the Orange River untenable. On the night of the 14th–15th, the same date on which they had abandoned Norval's Pont and Aliwal North, their rear-guard evacuated Bethulie, and the town was occupied next day by the British troops.

Steps were at once taken to increase the carrying capacity of the road bridge. During the following days deviation lines from the permanent way were laid to the bridge head on either bank and connected by rails over the structure itself. By this means it was possible to hand-shunt the trucks across without the delay of loading and unloading at each end.[2] This temporary arrangement seems only to have been completed a few days before the re-establishment of the regular traffic through Norval's Pont. In the meantime the road bridge must have been principally used to supply Gatacre's own column, for the bulk of the stores destined for the army at Bloemfontein had already been concentrated on the midland line south of Norval's. The choice

[1] Eighty-five yards of bridging capable of bearing field artillery.

[2] The road bridge was not strong enough to carry engines. Even had this not been the case very few were available.

between the two routes appears to have been made by Lord Kitchener during his visit to Arundel. Hence, no doubt, the allocation of nearly all the available pontoons to Clements's column and the concentration of all the available bridging materials and labour at Norval's Pont.

The day of Gatacre's entry into Bethulie was marked by a daring feat on the part of Captain Hennessey, of the Cape Police, and Captain Turner, of De Montmorency's Scouts. Learning by wire from an English railway ganger at Springfontein that the railway was intact and that the enemy were still at the junction guarding rolling stock, these two officers covered the 30 miles between Bethulie and that point on a trolley, surprised eight Boers asleep in the station, disarmed them, and on the 16th, with the aid of an English engine-driver, brought their prisoners back, together with two engines and over 40 trucks, to Bethulie. Next day some of Gatacre's Scouts reached Springfontein in time to see the trains carrying General Pole-Carew and the two battalions of Guards.

Gatacre and Brabant remained in position for several days for the purposes of collecting supplies and transport for the march into the Free State. An additional reason for delay in Brabant's case was the temporary unwillingness of a large part of the Colonial Division to advance across the Orange River. Factors of various kinds contributed to this result, most of them arising from the imperfect organisation of the division and its staff, the unavoidable ignorance of many of the Colonial officers of their duties in the field, and the inevitable friction caused by the collision of British and Colonial ideas of discipline. But the main cause no doubt lay in the fact that the Colonials were volunteers who had been originally enlisted for service in Cape Colony. Some of them had been in the field for two or three months, and, like all amateur soldiers, were anxious for a rest. In view of the expulsion of the enemy and the absence of any obligation to cross the Orange River many, not unnaturally, thought themselves justified in consulting their own inclinations and went home. Most of these probably enlisted in other corps later on. It would be very unfair to blame them for conduct which was a normal and necessary feature of a voluntary system. But the incident shows the unsoundness of

the principle of enlisting forces for the defence of limited geographical areas. Had the Colonial Division been ready to march northward at the same time as Clements's column, De Wet's expedition might have been checked at its outset.

But a detailed discussion of the possibilities contained in an earlier advance of the Colonial Division from the Orange River is outside the scope of a chapter which deals with the clearing of Cape Colony and the occupation by the British columns of the passages of the frontier stream. With their arrival at Aliwal North, Bethulie and Norval's Pont, the second part of Lord Roberts's plan was accomplished; it remains to narrate the events of the march to Bloemfontein, of which that second part was the necessary consequence.

CHAPTER XVII

POPLAR GROVE

REASON OF LORD ROBERTS'S HALT AT OSFONTEIN—ARRANGEMENTS TO SECURE THE WESTERN LINE AND KIMBERLEY AND TO PREPARE THE RELIEF OF MAFEKING—ORDERS FOR THE CONCENTRATION AT OSFONTEIN—REINFORCEMENTS—REORGANISATION OF THE MOUNTED INFANTRY—WEAKNESS OF HORSES—BOERS GATHERING TO OPPOSE THE ADVANCE—RECONNAISSANCES DURING FIRST WEEK OF MARCH—LORD ROBERTS'S PLAN OF BATTLE—BOER POSITION—DISPOSITIONS AND INTENTIONS OF DE WET—COLVILE'S ADVANCE ON THE NORTH BANK—SLOWNESS OF HIS MOVEMENT—REASONS OF THIS—ORDER FROM HEADQUARTERS TO PUSH ON—BEGINNING OF THE BOER RETREAT—MOVEMENT OF CAVALRY AND 6TH DIVISION—ADVANCE OF FRENCH FROM KALKFONTEIN—DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD OF MANŒUVRE—BROADWOOD SEIZES MIDDLEPUNT FARM—DISPOSITION OF THE CAVALRY DIVISION AT 10 A.M.—COURSE ADOPTED BY FRENCH—RESULTS OF FRENCH'S DECISION—THE ADVANCE CHECKED—FARM EVACUATED BY BRITISH AND REOCCUPIED BY BOERS—PORTER'S ARTILLERY UNDER FIRE OF BOER SNIPERS—CHARGE OF 9TH LANCERS—BROADWOOD'S RETIREMENT—THE FARM RETAKEN—ADVANCE TOWARDS SALDERPOORT—THE CAVALRY AGAIN HELD UP—LAST SKIRMISH WITH BOER REARGUARD—ADVANCE OF TUCKER—MOUNTED INFANTRY SKIRMISH IN FRONT OF SALDERPOORT—MARTYR'S ADVANCE—SALDERPOORT EVACUATED BY ENEMY AND OCCUPIED BY MOUNTED TROOPS—COLVILE SEIZES LEEUW KOP—A GUN TAKEN—PROGRESS AND END OF COLVILE'S ADVANCE—THE ARMY BIVOUACS—REASONS OF THE ENEMY'S ESCAPE—FRENCH'S LEADERSHIP—DISTRIBUTION OF COMMAND—CONCLUSION

WHILE the commotion of Cronje's fall rolled its ever-broadening circles along the borders of the Free State and far into the surrounding territories, Lord Roberts's army remained at Osfontein and Koedoesrand. The principal cause of this vexatious delay was lack of supplies and transport. The plan of the march to Bloemfontein, which in face of a more powerful enemy would have involved great risks, was justified by the very superior numbers of the invader and the disorganisation of the defenders. But these two factors could only operate so long as the momentum of the march was maintained, so long, that is, as the invaders made their strength felt and the Boers were given no time to rally. It was important from every point of view that the movement, too long delayed, should not again be checked; and its continued progress, which would render communication with the western railway more and more uncertain, could only be

ensured by the collection of means of subsistence sufficient to render the army independent until the new line of supply through Norval's Pont could be opened. It was to the provision of these and to the organisation of the defence of the railway which he was about to abandon that Lord Roberts now turned his attention.

On March 1st he went to Kimberley to confer with Lord Methuen. Already, on the morning of February 17th, he had entrusted that officer with the security of Kimberley and its neighbourhood; and most of the troops destined to compose his force were now disposable or in movement to join him. The 3rd, 5th, and 10th Battalions of Imperial Yeomanry, brigaded under Lord Chesham, were moving up-country; the 9th Infantry Brigade and the 20th and 38th Field Batteries were already at Kimberley. In addition to these troops Lord Roberts placed under Lord Methuen's orders two batteries of Canadian Artillery, the New South Wales battery, three Militia battalions, which were timed to arrive at Capetown on March 10th, and the 1st Highland Light Infantry, which since the morning of February 17th had remained at Klip Kraal. On the arrival of the Militia these four battalions were to be brigaded together; and the 1st Munster Fusiliers and the 2nd Royal Warwickshire Regiment, which during February had been employed on or near the railway, were to join the main army.[1] The completion of these arrangements and the approach of other Imperial and Colonial reinforcements would suffice to ensure the safety of the line, set free the Brigade of Guards for active operations, cover the left rear of the invading force and prepare the way for the relief of Mafeking.

At the same time orders were issued for the increase of the main army. The Mounted Infantry then gathering at Modder River, the Guards Brigade at Klip Drift and Klip Kraal, and Lieutenant-Colonel Flint's Brigade Division of Field Artillery[2] at Jacobsdal, were all to reach Osfontein by March 6th. The 15th Brigade of the 7th Division,

[1] The Warwickshire Regiment belonged to the 18th Brigade; the Munsters were to be incorporated in the 19th to take the place of the 1st Gordon Highlanders. It was at first intended that this battalion should be transferred to the Highland Brigade to replace the Highland Light Infantry; but on the representation of the last-named regiment the original arrangement was maintained.

[2] 83rd, 84th, and 85th Batteries.

which had remained at Jacobsdal and was to form the escort of the last convoy from Modder River, was to attain the same point on the day following. On its arrival the line of communication with the Modder Camp was to be abandoned; the Kimberley route being kept open until everything was ready for the advance on Bloemfontein.[1] The reinforcements would raise Lord Roberts's army to a strength of over 30,000 men and 116 guns.

The arrival of new corps of Mounted Infantry and the death of Colonel Hannay, the nominal commander of that arm, rendered its reorganisation advisable; and the force, now numbering over 5,000 horses, was divided into four brigades, under Lieut.-Colonels Alderson, Le Gallais, Martyr, and Ridley, each composed of two regiments of Regular Mounted Infantry and two or more corps of Colonials.[2] The

[1] Despatch No. 3. It is evident that the British General did not intend to relinquish his hold on the western line until he was reasonably sure that the enemy could not interrupt his advance to the Bloemfontein railway. In the event the last troops and waggons did not leave Osfontein until March 10th.

[2] Order of March 4th. The constitution of these brigades, together with their strength in horses on arrival at Bloemfontein, which was naturally somewhat weaker than on the evening of March 6th, was as follows:—

1st Brigade, Lieut.-Colonel Alderson.

	Horses.
1st Mounted Infantry Regiment ...	423
3rd Mounted Infantry Regiment ...	228
Roberts's Horse	387
New Zealand Mounted Infantry ...	72
Rimington's Guides...	110

80 officers, 1,314 men, 1,220 horses.

2nd Brigade, Lieut.-Colonel Le Gallais.

	Horses.
6th Mounted Infantry	330
8th Mounted Infantry	254
C.I.V. Mounted Infantry	145
Kitchener's Horse	270
Nesbitt's Horse	136
New South Wales Mounted Infantry	345

95 officers, 1,816 men, 1,480 horses.

3rd Brigade, Lieut.-Colonel Martyr.

	Horses.
2nd Mounted Infantry	489
4th Mounted Infantry	251
Burmah (2nd Durham Company, 2nd Essex, 2nd West Riding)...	322
1st Queensland Mounted Infantry	211
2nd Queensland Mounted Infantry	158

66 officers, 1,418 men, 1,431 horses.

4th Brigade, Lieut.-Colonel Ridley.

	Horses.
5th Mounted Infantry	276
7th Mounted Infantry	262
1st City of Grahamstown Volunteers	231
Ceylon Mounted Infantry ...	109

47 officers, 955 men, 878 horses.

Grand total on reaching Bloemfontein, 288 officers, 5,503 men, 5,009 horses.

new corps were of very unequal quality, and there is no doubt that had most of them been left temporarily on the line of communication and their horses used to remount the cavalry, the army would have gained rather than lost. The material of which they were composed was good enough; and one unit, the Burmah Mounted Infantry, consisted of veteran troops trained in Indian warfare. But the newly raised Colonials were scarcely fit for immediate work. The three companies of the 2nd New South Wales contingent had much to learn before they could hope to equal Antill's men with whom they were now united; and Nesbitt's Horse and the Grahamstown Volunteers, though good specimens of South African levies, suffered from the various disadvantages inherent in new organisations. It was the more unfortunate that their horses were not made over to the troops who had marched from Modder River, in that the condition of the animals of those corps was already deplorable, and remounts were few and far between. Only two hundred arrived during the halt at Osfontein, and these, though originally intended for the Mounted Infantry, were handed over to the Cavalry.[1] The forage problem was still unsolved. In spite of the efforts of the supply and transport departments full rations up to the time of reaching Bloemfontein were never obtainable. Even those regiments which were in bivouac at Koedoesrand were sadly underfed. Two to five pounds of oats unsupplemented, in the absence of grazing, by bulkier food, were all that could be obtained. Even under the most favourable conditions, a week would have been far too short a time in which to recondition the horses after their recent fatigues and privations. But the days that followed Cronje's capture were not a period of rest any more than of plenty. The proximity of the enemy and the constant patrol and outpost duty that it entailed gave the unfortunate animals little time to recuperate; and although the Mounted Infantry, with the exception of two regiments left to cover the flank at Kameelfontein, were pushed forward to assist the cavalry

[1] Like most of the remounts sent subsequently, these animals had not had time to recover from the voyage, and were in very soft condition. A further difficulty was the size of the regulation cavalry saddles, which, being made to fit English horses, were too large for the Indian country-breds.

at Koedoesrand and Makaauw's, the cessation of active operations left the demobilised squadrons more exhausted than it found them.

The prolonged halt at Paardeberg had given the Boers time to bring up reinforcements; and though unable to avert disaster, they were now fast gathering, under the vigorous leadership of De Wet, to oppose a further British advance. On the afternoon of the day on which Cronje surrendered Le Gallais reported that the Poplar Grove hills were held in force; and French and Colonel Haig, who narrowly escaped drowning whilst crossing the flooded Modder, went out to reconnoitre the enemy's position. It seems at first to have been intended that the Cavalry should drive the Boers away, but on the advice of his cavalry leader Lord Roberts abandoned the design, and the next week was spent in extensive reconnaissances on both banks of the river preparatory to the blow which he had determined to strike when his preparations were complete.

Day by day it became more certain that the enemy were preparing to dispute in earnest the progress of the army towards Bloemfontein. On March 1st, General French, from a hill two miles north of Makaauw's, observed Boers erecting stone schanzes and digging trenches near Poplar Grove Drift.[1] On the following morning emplacements for five guns were visible, and a large body of the enemy with twenty waggons were seen on the left bank moving towards the river, apparently with the intention of crossing it to reinforce the northern half of the line. Heavy rain obscured the view during the day, but at 6 p.m. an officer's patrol was sent out, followed in an hour by Major Scobell and a squadron of the Scots Greys, which remained out during the night and reported the continuation of the hostile movement. Next morning a part of the 1st Cavalry Brigade with T Battery advancing from Makaauw's found Leeuw Kop and the range of hills to the north occupied and entrenched. In endeavouring to turn the Boer right, Porter drew the fire of a gun on Leeuw Kop, and ascertained, by means of an officer's patrol which pushed in between the Kop and the northern hills, the presence of Boer laagers on the right bank. Later on he called up U Battery with another squadron and part of Alderson's Mounted Infantry;

[1] See map p. 518.

and in the course of the afternoon these troops became engaged against the enemy's right. Nothing of note took place, and after four hours of long-range firing the whole British force fell back. On the 4th another reconnaissance in the same direction found the Boers in increased numbers, and Major Allenby's squadron of the Inniskillings was left to watch the enemy.

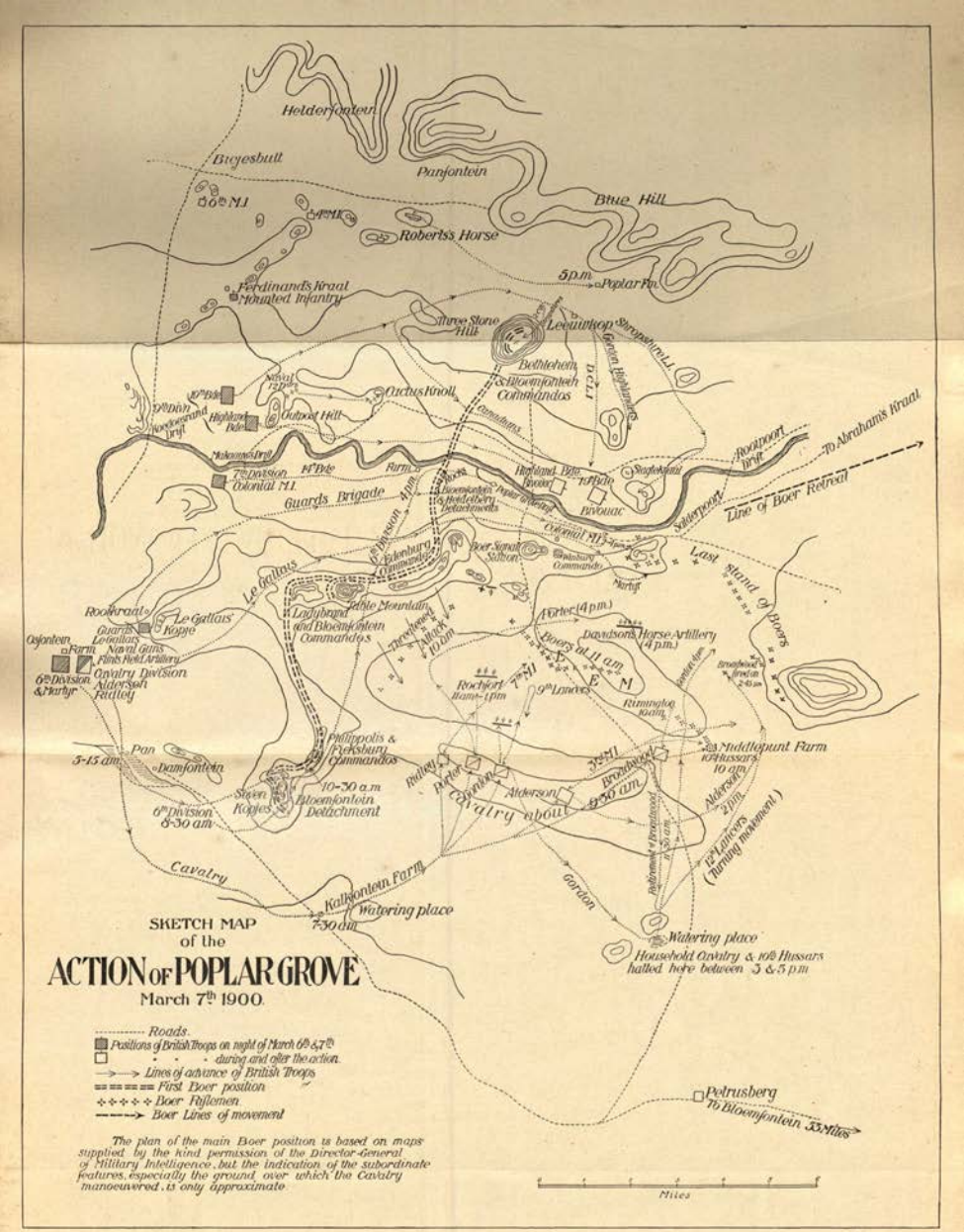
On the left bank, where the Household Cavalry now held the farm originally occupied by the 9th Lancers, evidences of the Boers' determination to fight were equally certain. On March 4th, Major Lawrence, with Burnham the scout, penetrated to the south of the group of hills known as the Seven Kopjes, and his report, which was confirmed two days later, showed that the Boer positions on both banks of the river covered altogether twelve miles of front. The news of the Boer retirement from Cape Colony and in Natal convinced Roberts that the moment for action had come, and the arrival of the expected convoys and reinforcements removed the last cause for further delay. On March 6th he rode out with General French to Outpost Hill, north of Makaauw's Drift, examined the enemy's position, and decided to attack on the next day. Orders were at once issued for the concentration of French's Division, and during the afternoon the whole of the Cavalry came into bivouac at Osfontein, the outposts on the right bank being taken over by the 4th Mounted Infantry Regiment and two squadrons of Roberts's Horse.[1] The Field Marshal himself returned to his headquarters, called together the officers commanding divisions, and in the barn at Osfontein explained his plan of battle.

Proceeding on the supposition that all the disposable reinforcements from Cape Colony and Natal had joined the enemy in front he estimated their numbers as, at the outside, 14,000 strong with 20 guns.[2] Of their dispositions he was accurately informed; and huge as was the field of battle, his plan, which was intended to give full scope to the action of the different arms, offered hopes of a decisive victory.

The Cavalry Division, accompanied by Alderson and Ridley's

[1] These troops had been brought to Ferdinand's Kraal on the 5th and 6th of March.

[2] The estimate of the American attaché with the Boers was 2,500. This is certainly too low. Probably the enemy numbered about 7,000.



SKETCH MAP
of the

ACTION OF POPLAR GROVE

March 7th 1900.

The plan of the main Boer position is based on maps supplied by the kind permission of the Director-General of Military Intelligence, but the indication of the subordinate features, especially the ground over which the Cavalry manoeuvred, is only approximate.

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Brigades of Mounted Infantry and the seven batteries of Horse Artillery, were to march south-east from Osfontein, "its object being to circle round the left flank of the Boers, to take their line of entrenchments in reverse, and moving eventually to the river near Poplar Grove to cut off their line of retreat." Lord Roberts intended that French should be well in rear of the Boer left by daybreak, and had calculated that a march of 17 miles would bring him to the river at a point some two miles above Poplar Grove Drift. If on the way opportunities arose of damaging the enemy's laagers, horses or transport by artillery fire, French was to make full use of them. By destroying their ponies and baggage the Field Marshal hoped in time to compel the enemy to make terms; the more so because, if the operation succeeded, they would be cut off from their supplies at Bloemfontein. The Cavalry were to march at 3 a.m. on the following morning. It appears that in the first instance an all-night march, which might have enabled them to reach the river at dawn, was contemplated. The advantages of such a course were obvious, and it must be presumed that the difficulties which would have attended its execution prevented its being adopted. The movement of so considerable a mass of horses and guns over a roadless country at night would have been a critical and undoubtedly a most exhausting operation; and at this period the troops were not so well practised in night marching as they afterwards became. The German General Staff account suggests that a long circuitous march by Emmaus might have brought the division on to the rear of the Boer army by midnight, and would have given time for the horses to be fed and watered, and for the men to rest before day broke and fighting began. In view of the known carelessness of the enemy in matters of outpost and reconnaissance duty, it is possible that such an operation might have been carried out without attracting attention; but it may be questioned whether even the 10 or 12 hours available between sunset and sunrise would have sufficed for so long a march; and a start by daylight would have been at once observed by the Boers, who from their positions south of the Modder overlooked the British camps. In view of these considerations it is easy to see why Lord Roberts, whose whole plan was based on the assumption

that the enemy, as heretofore, would stand to fight, thought that a start before dawn on the following morning would allow the Cavalry sufficient time to accomplish their task. The 6th Division, preceded by Martyr's Mounted Infantry[1] and supported by its own Brigade Division and the 65th Howitzer Battery, was to follow the Cavalry until it reached a point south-west[2] of the Seven Kopjes, which formed the left end of the Boer position. It was then to wheel to the north-east, clear the hills by a combined attack of all arms, and march on Table Mountain, the high, flat-topped hill which rising some four miles east of Rooikraal[3] formed the enemy's centre. In his attack upon this position Kelly-Kenny was to be supported from the west by the Guards, Colonel Flint's Brigade Division, the four 4.7 Naval guns, and Le Gallais' Brigade of Mounted Infantry,[4] which were to be in position on and behind Le Gallais' Kopje at dawn. Lord Roberts anticipated that the capture of Table Mountain and the appearance of the Cavalry on their line of retreat would compel the enemy to retire to the river or to try to force their way across it at Poplar Grove Drift. To prevent this and to divert their attention from the main attack, he ordered the 14th Brigade,[5] supported by Tucker's Divisional Artillery,[6] Nesbitt's Horse, the New South Wales Mounted Infantry, and three companies of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, to march eastward along the south bank, threatening the enemy's trenches between the mass of Table Mountain and the river. As soon as the movement on the left bank had developed, the 9th Division, with the 4th and 6th Mounted Infantry and three Naval 12-pounders[7] was to co-operate on the right bank and driving

[1] Minus the 4th Mounted Infantry employed on the north bank, and three companies of the Queensland contingents detached to accompany the 14th Brigade. The remainder with Martyr numbered about 850 rifles.

[2] In Lord Roberts's despatch, "south-east." This is clearly an error.

[3] The farm occupied by the 9th Lancers on February 21st. The eminence which overhung it on the east was known as Le Gallais' Kopje.

[4] Nesbitt's Horse and the New South Wales Mounted Infantry were detached to accompany the 7th Division, the 6th Mounted Infantry was with Colvile. The troops remaining with Le Gallais numbered about 1,000 rifles.

[5] The 15th Brigade of the 7th Division was, on its arrival, told off to guard the baggage and camps.

[6] 18th, 62nd, 75th Batteries.

[7] The fourth 12-pounder had bulged, and been sent back to Simonstown.

the enemy from the Leeuw Kop, and the trenches between it and the river, prevent his escape to the northward. Lord Roberts proposed to take up his station on Le Gallais' Kopje, and arrangements were made to place him in signalling communication with the different divisions. All baggage was to be left in camp.

It will thus be seen that the whole army was to converge along either bank upon Poplar Grove and the Slaagtekraal kopjes, and gradually heading the enemy into the river hollow, encircle them on all sides and oblige them to surrender. Five thousand horsemen and 42 guns were to bar the eastern roads to Abraham's Kraal and Bloemfontein, 12,000 infantry, 2,500 mounted infantry and 64 guns were to press them back from the west and south-west, and 6,000 infantry, with 800 mounted troops and three long-range guns, were to shut off all escape to the northward. The success of the scheme depended on the Cavalry being in time to intercept the enemy's retreat, and on the rapidity with which the infantry columns could close in to their support.[1]

In resolving to strike round the Boer left, Lord Roberts had marked the weak point of what was otherwise a very strong position. On the left bank the main ridge held by the enemy formed a rectangle, its apex facing towards Osfontein, its two arms, each about five miles long, running the one east and parallel to the river, the other due south. The angle itself was formed of the powerful bastion of Table Mountain, the fire from which commanded the ground west of it and between it and the river-bed. This latter space was further barred by a line of trenches and schanzes which, following the crest of an outcrop of rock, touched the river about two miles west of Poplar Grove Drift, and the kopjes of the northern arm of the ridge about the same distance to the east of Table Mountain. Beyond that hill, where the ridge ran to the south, the crest sank down almost to the level of the rolling plain and then rose again into the group of broken eminences known as the Seven Kopjes.

[1] It is perhaps worth noticing that if the Cavalry had fulfilled their part they would for some hours have been exposed to the enemy's efforts before the main body could have pushed in the screen of riflemen which would presumably have been left on the Table Mountain hills, and have begun to affect the fight about Salderpoort.

Along this front, which was fully ten miles in length, De Wet, who since the death of Ferreira[1] had been placed by Steyn in chief command, had posted his main body. The Seven Kopjes were occupied by three guns and detachments of the Philippolis, Ficksburg, and Bloemfontein Commandos, who also held the section of lower ground south of Table Mountain. A few slight trenches dug on the slopes facing towards the British camps were on this part of the Boer line the only artificial protection. Table Mountain was held by the Ladybrand and part of the Bloemfontein Commando with three Krupp guns, one of which was mounted on its summit. It was prepared for an obstinate defence, every gun being covered by rocks and sandbags, and shelters for riflemen being built all along its crest. East of the hill, the northern slope of the heights facing the river was occupied by the Edenburg Commando, the trenches between the hills and river being entrusted to another detachment of Bloemfontein men and the Heildelbergers. Two miles in rear of these last, and about a mile south of Poplar Grove Drift, rose a steep hill used by De Wet as a signal station, in rear of which the Winburg Commando was posted as a reserve. Here also was the main mass of the baggage.

On the right bank, three miles from the river, the key of the Boer position was the Leeuw Kop, a rocky, precipitous hill 300 to 400 feet high, on which had been placed a Krupp gun. It was held by the Bethlehem and Potschefstroom Commandos, whose camps were hidden behind its southern slope. South-west of the Kop a few slight trenches extended at intervals towards the river; to the north a valley three miles wide was flanked by the rough broken ridges which Alderson had tried to turn on March 3rd, and which were still occupied by detachments belonging to De Wet's force. This flank was further strengthened by a commando from Boshof which had arrived with three guns on the morning of the 6th.

The weakness of the Boer left at the Seven Kopjes was obvious to the more skilled of De Wet's advisers. De Villebois Mareuil and the American Attaché clearly foresaw what plan Lord Roberts would adopt, and realised its consequences; but the Boer General,

[1] This officer had been accidently shot at Paardeberg.

strongly impressed with the importance of gaining time for the organisation of the defences of Bloemfontein and the escape of the scattered forces in Cape Colony, was resolved to maintain his position; and devotes most of his meagre account of the battle to regrets over the precipitate flight of his men, to which indeed he mainly owed the safety of his force. Had the Boers stayed to fight, the story of Poplar Grove would have been very different. At any rate, though the stir in the British camps was observed on the evening of the 6th, and reports of the turning movement coupled with requests for reinforcements, reached De Wet during the night,[1] he seems to have made no effort to withdraw or reinforce the threatened wing. When day dawned the Boers were still in their positions, and in the subsequent action the control passed almost entirely out of their leader's hands.

The preliminary movements of the British army were completed during the afternoon of the 6th.[2] The Cavalry, the 6th Division, and the Guards Brigade with their attendant batteries and mounted infantry, were grouped round Osfontein, the first-named bivouacking in column of brigade masses with the guns in their rear. The Naval Brigade brought their guns to Le Gallais' Kopje, placing them below the sky-line ready to run into position at dawn. The 14th Brigade took ground near Makaauw's Drift, having opposite to it on the right bank the brigades of the 9th Division, the Highlanders being nearest to the river. On the extreme left the Mounted Infantry of Henry and De Lisle bivouacked at Ferdinand's Kraal.

Next to the movement of the Cavalry that of Colvile was the most important, and if any exception is to be taken to the general distribution of the army, it probably is that his force, which was intended to close the northern line of retreat, should have been reinforced with a brigade division of field artillery and more mounted infantry. The

[1] Report of American Attaché, p. 190.

[2] This concentration in view of the enemy had obvious disadvantages. Presumably the difficulties connected with the massing of troops in one locality at night, and the desire to give the men a full night's rest had influence with the headquarter staff. In this connection the early distribution of rations from the newly arrived convoys was of great importance; some of the mounted infantry who arrived late in the evening were employed in loading waggons during the greater part of the night.

position which he had to attack was a strong one, and if a complete success was to be gained, it was essential that he should be able to overwhelm it as soon as the enemy began to abandon the hills on the opposite bank. As events turned out, this weakness in guns and horsemen was not of great importance, but had the operations on the left bank been more effective, the enemy would certainly have defended the Leeuw Kop and the trenches between it and the river more vigorously; and might have succeeded in holding Colvile back until the greater part of their mounted men had crossed the Poplar Grove Drift and made good their escape. Seeing that everything would depend on the early capture of the Leeuw Kop itself, the commander of the 9th Divison directed the 19th Brigade to be at Three Stone Hill, about 4,000 yards to the west of it, by dawn. Smith-Dorrien was then to work round to the north side, turn the position, and if possible seize the hill. As, however, at the time of issuing his orders General Colvile was not sure whether the northern range was occupied or not, and the operation entailed the risk of a flank attack from that direction, the Mounted Infantry were ordered to cover Smith-Dorrien's left, reconnoitre Leeuw Kop, and if possible occupy Blue Hill. The Highland Brigade were to advance on an order from Colvile towards the trenches south of the Kop, clear the scrub along the river, and conform to the movements of the 19th Brigade, with which connection was to be maintained. Half a battalion was to be detailed as escort to the Naval 12-pounders, which were placed under the orders of Colonel Hughes Hallett, the officer temporarily commanding the Highland Brigade.[1]

At the appointed hour Smith-Dorrien marched off, and by dawn had reached Three Stone Hill, where he awaited the further order to advance upon the Leeuw Kop. The Mounted Infantry had already moved on an order from the Chief of the Staff to confront the Boshof Boers, who were occupying the hills at Helderfontein and Panfontein. From these positions, about five miles to the left flank and rear of the 19th Brigade, the enemy were able to prevent Colonel Henry from pushing on to reconnoitre the Leeuw Kop and clear the way for Smith-Dorrien, as

[1] General Macdonald was still in hospital.

had been intended. The 6th Mounted Infantry took up a position three miles north of Ferdinand's Kraal, the 4th were two miles to their right, south of Helderfontein; to their right again, facing Panfontein and Blue Hill, were the two squadrons of Roberts's Horse. Occupying some six miles of front, these 800 mounted men, who were probably confronted by at least an equal number of Boers with four guns,[1] could do no more than cover the movements of the Infantry, on whose unaided efforts the success of the main attack henceforth depended.

At dawn the Highland Brigade crossed Outpost Hill and began to move towards the enemy's trenches, making good each wooded bend of the river as they went along. Progress was slow, for the brigade had too often experienced the deadly effect of unexpected rifle fire from the thick vegetation of the Modder bed to assume that silence implied unoccupation; and the two-and-a-half weak battalions at Hughes Hallett's disposal, unsupported by the 14th Brigade on the opposite bank, moved with great circumspection, momentarily expecting an outburst of fire. General Colvile also, although half convinced by the sight of men and animals on the eastern sky-line that the Boers did not mean to stand, remembered too well the fights of Modder River and Paardeberg to believe that the enemy whom he had seen fight so strongly was really meditating retreat, and did not attempt to hurry his infantry into what might have been a trap. Moreover a rapid advance would have been inconsistent with the general plan, according to which the left and centre were to wait until the great turning movement on the right had so far developed as to oblige the enemy to commence the evacution of their positions. An immediate general advance was likely to give the alarm and cause them to retire before the Cavalry were in a position to intercept them. Therefore for three hours after dawn[2] the Highland Brigade contented themselves with slowly feeling their way forward, while Smith-Dorrien stood motionless behind Three Stone Hill waiting till Hughes Hallett should be near enough to co-operate.

At last, at 9.10 a.m., a heliogram reached Colvile from the Commander-in-Chief announcing that the Boers were moving their

[1] A 9-pounder, two 3-pounders, and a 1-pounder Vickers-Maxim. [2] 5.56 a.m.

laager towards the river at Table Mountain and ordering the 9th Division to push on and intercept their retreat at the drift. Hughes Hallett was immediately directed to neglect the river banks and to advance straight on the trenches; Smith-Dorrien was warned of the Highlanders' movement and ordered to co-operate as fast as he could, and Lieutenant Dean's 12-pounders came into action on Outpost Hill against a line of Boer waggons retreating eastward along the opposite bank. At the same moment the watchers on Three Stone Hill saw a Cape cart drawn by six horses gallop furiously to the rear. It was President Kruger, who had just arrived at De Wet's headquarters, and had scarcely outspanned his team before the increasing sound of artillery fire to the southward warned him that the Boer line of retreat was already in danger.

French's Division had left Osfontein at 3 a.m.[1] in column of regimental masses, guns on the inner or left flank of brigades, Broadwood leading, followed by Gordon, Porter, Alderson, and Ridley. Marching southward under the guidance of Major Lawrence, the massive column of horsemen reached the dry pan at Damfontein at 5.15 a.m., where for more than half an hour it halted to wait for daylight. This delay entailed a further disadvantage. The 6th Division, which had left Osfontein at 3.15 a.m. and followed a line slightly to the west or outside that pursued by French, was surprised, on bending south-eastwards towards the Seven Kopjes, to find its march blocked by the Cavalry which it had supposed to be far ahead, and was obliged to wait for half an hour until the masses of horsemen had cleared its front. Kelly-Kenny then resumed his advance, and preceded by Martyr, who had orders to keep the Cavalry in sight, gradually wheeled his Division to the east and deployed for attack. The 18th Brigade was ordered to assault the position in front, the 13th and the Mounted Infantry moving farther to the south, were directed to turn the Boer left. Parties of burghers could be plainly seen leaving the hills; but at half-past seven the mounted scouts reported that the enemy were still in

[1] According to Lord Roberts's despatch the hour fixed for the start was 2 a.m. Mr. Goldmann says that, soon after leaving the Commander-in-Chief, General French sent for Major Lawrence and told him to be ready to start at 3 a.m. The fact seems to have been that the division paraded at 2 a.m., and that the actual start was made an hour later.

position and Kelly-Kenny's batteries came into action between the brigades, the Infantry slowly advancing while the guns bombarded the kopjes.[1] No reply was made to this fire, and soon after it commenced Lord Roberts signalled to ask what the Artillery were firing at, as the Boers had already evacuated the position. Some of them had, in fact, bolted at the first shell from the 4·7 guns on Le Gallais' Kopje, which had opened on Table Mountain and the Seven Kopjes two hours before. The 6th Division now advanced, and between 10 and 11 a.m., without firing a shot, crowned the southern end of the ridge. Here for a short time it rested.

The Naval gun fire was not the principal cause of the enemy's sudden withdrawal. Soon after 6 a.m. French, continuing his movement to the south-eastward, came under the fire of a gun on the extreme south end of the Seven Kopjes. The long range prevented its shrapnel from being effective, but the first shot announced the discovery of the turning movement, and it was not long before the enemy's waggons began to move to the north in the direction of the river. Day had now fully broken, and the intention of the Cavalry as it advanced over the open plain east of the Seven Kopjes was revealed. Success henceforth depended on rapidity, and rapidity alone.

Swerving slightly to his right to get out of range of the enemy's gun, French moved on at a walk, and getting under cover of a swell of ground running eastward towards Kalkfontein Farm, watered his horses at the pan. At the same time he pushed out a screen to the north and north-west, and sent P Battery, escorted by a squadron of the 10th Hussars, to shell a few waggons which could be seen hurrying northward along the eastern slopes of the Seven Kopjes. Before the mass of the Division was again in movement it was 8 a.m.; two hours had elapsed since the first alarm had been given, and fully ten miles had yet to be covered before the Salderpoort Kopjes, which commanded the eastern roads, could be reached.

The ground over which the Cavalry Division was about to advance was an undulating grassy plain, to the unmilitary eye an ideal field for cavalry action, but broken here and there by low outcrops of rock

[1] The batteries changed position three times before they got within range of the hills.

and shallow dongas, and rising and falling in a series of hollows and ridges, broad enough to give a good field of fire and steep enough to afford some degree of cover to lines of skirmishers. Some three miles to the north of Kalkfontein a low but well-marked ridge crossed it from west to east; to the north again another low rise ran from the eastern end of the Table Mountain Ridge towards the south-east. Just where it sunk to the plain was the small farm-house of Middlepunt, covered on its southern side by an enclosure of cactus fences. Further to the east rose other and higher hills; to the north, near the river, were the craggy eminences of Salderpoort; and from the westward the whole of the ground over which French had to operate was overlooked by the rearward faces of the positions round Table Mountain.

Preceded by C Squadron of the 10th Hussars and Rimington's Guides, Broadwood pressed rapidly forward to the north-west, crowned the first ridge about 9 a.m. and occupied the Middlepunt Farm with the Hussars. At the same time Rimington dismounted, and with the aid of some guns partially cleared the slope to its left (M) of the enemy's snipers, numbers of whom were already in movement to oppose the Cavalry.[1] The rest of the 2nd Brigade followed and halted in the hollow between the ridges at a point (D) where the swell of the ground gave some cover from rifle fire. The 3rd and 1st Cavalry Brigades and Ridley's Mounted Infantry had already wheeled successively to the left on to the first ridge, and Alderson took ground in rear of Broadwood; so that by 10 a.m. the whole of French's force was in line fronting northwards, its right at the farm being within about five miles of the river,[2] along the bank of which waves of dust marked the straggling retreat of the Boer waggons. In spite of the delays of the morning, another hour might have seen the Horse Artillery within striking distance of the defenceless flank of the enemy's baggage, and a few well-directed shells might have brought it to a halt as they had done at Woolvekraal. Had Broadwood at once pushed on, and had he been supported by Alderson and

[1] See map, p. 518.

[2] The position of Middlepunt farmhouse is difficult to fix accurately, as several unnamed houses are marked on the maps of the neighbourhood. Some accounts place it within three miles of the river, others as far off as seven.

Gordon and the mass of the Artillery, there seems little doubt that at that time the enemy's fighting men would not have been far enough to the east to prevent the British troops from blocking the line of retreat, or at least from inflicting a very heavy loss on the long strings of waggons between the plain and the river.

But neither Broadwood nor Alderson, though they reported at once, felt justified in advancing further without French's orders; and unfortunately at this critical moment the latter was five or six miles away at the other extremity of the line. He had ridden on with the advanced scouts towards Table Mountain, the point on which Lord Roberts, and no doubt he himself, expected the course of the action to turn, and along the southern and eastern slopes of which large numbers of the enemy could now be seen confusedly moving. It was clear that the Boers were leaving their positions, and the increasing rattle of rifle fire to the northward showed that his scouts were sharply engaged, and seemed to prelude a serious attack against his left front. Knowing that his horses were scarcely able to trot, the British cavalry leader shrank from the risk of over extension, and felt himself obliged to concentrate the division to meet the threatened counter stroke. Therefore, instead of attacking with his right wing, the wing that most directly threatened the enemy's rear and at the moment was least strongly opposed, instead of aiming at the head of the enemy's column and keeping outstretched the arm which alone could anticipate and bar the stream of retiring waggons and horsemen, he resolved to mass his troops to the left and to meet the impending blow by a direct thrust to the northward.

The first results of his decision were orders to abandon the farm and ridge seized by Rimington's Guides and the 10th Hussars, and to concentrate all the available batteries to the left and left centre of the front held by the Division. Porter's Brigade Division was immediately sent forward to shell the Boers in the plain to the south of Table Mountain and along the river-bed; the 1st Cavalry Brigade moving in rear of the guns. Behind him, somewhat to the left, was Ridley; Gordon filled the centre of the line on his right rear; and G Battery, belonging to Broadwood, was sent across to join Gordon's

Brigade Division. Consequently when guns were wanted on the right none were immediately available.[1] Alderson was left on the crest of the first ridge to the left rear of Broadwood. Thus at the very moment when the left and left centre moved northward the right did not merely halt, but actually lost ground, and the positions already occupied were evacuated.

The enemy were not slow to perceive the fault, and about 11 a.m. their skirmishers began to reappear on the ridge north-west of the farm, bringing a galling fire to bear on detachments of the 2nd Brigade west of the house. Further to the left other riflemen opened fire against the flank of Porter's artillery, which was engaged in shelling a Boer gun (X) on the hills to the northward and a string of waggons retreating along the river bank. So sharp was the fire of the Boer snipers that in Rochfort's Batteries twenty-one horses were killed and five men wounded before the former could be withdrawn to safety. A section of Q Battery now wheeled to the right, and sweeping the ridge with shrapnel tried to drive the enemy out of rifle range. But they still clung to the crest-line, and Ridley's Brigade was sent forward to clear the flank. The 5th Mounted Infantry, with the Grahamstown Volunteers on their right and one company of the 7th Mounted Infantry on their left, formed for attack, but before they came up a squadron of the 9th Lancers had charged and been obliged to retire with sixteen men wounded.[2] Moving to their right front, the Mounted Infantry came under a hot rifle fire, and it was an hour after midday before they had cleared the north-western portion of the ridge (E) and had occupied with three companies of the 7th Mounted Infantry the ground (É) from which the Boer snipers had fired upon Porter's Batteries. The 1st Cavalry Brigade, which at 11 a.m. had been ordered to hold the enemy in front, was now in line of squadron columns on the left rear of its guns, having taken no part in the fighting, though Colonel Porter's own horse had been hit and bullets were flying everywhere.

[1] P Battery, early detached to shell the rear of the Seven Kopjes, did not rejoin the 2nd Brigade till nearly midday.

[2] Some misunderstanding seems to have taken place. It appears to have been intended that the squadron should act dismounted on the right of the Mounted Infantry.

While the centre and left were thus held fast Broadwood's Brigade, which had been dismounted in the hollow between the first and second ridges, had been obliged to retire. About 11 a.m. a party of Boers had reoccupied the farm and opened a heavy fire on the mass of horses, the bullets fortunately going high. P Battery, which had by this time come up, was at first unable to silence this fire, and the 2nd Brigade, which was considerably exposed, was ordered to fall back. As they mounted, Lieutenant Keswick, of the 12th Lancers, was killed by a bullet in the forehead; Bailey, of the same regiment, was wounded in the shoulder; and several men and horses were hit before the Cavalry got out of range. The forward movement had been checked all along the line, and French, realising that the direct advance was likely to be strongly opposed, resolved on the turning movement which an hour and a half earlier would probably have ended in decisive success.

As Broadwood withdrew French sent the 3rd Mounted Infantry Regiment against the ridge and farm, and this corps, supported by the fire of P Battery and a wide turning movement of the 12th Lancers and the rest of Alderson's Brigade to the south-eastward, succeeded in driving the enemy out and regaining the abandoned positions. Pushing on rapidly in spite of the exhaustion of the horses,[1] P Battery reached a point to the north of the main body and shelled the retreating burghers vigorously, while French ordered Gordon, who had been watering his horses at a pan three miles to the southward, to support Alderson and Broadwood. Ridley was to follow Gordon, and the whole pressing north-eastward, were to seize the Salderpoort Kopjes and so cut off any portion of the enemy's column still within reach.

It was now two hours after midday. The enemy were nowhere visible, the sound of Porter's guns had died away, and everything seemed to betoken an unopposed advance to the river. Broadwood collected his brigade, and, accompanied by P Battery, moved direct on Salderpoort; Gordon and Ridley advanced on his left rear; still further to the left Porter, hearing the rapid fire of P Battery, also turned

[1] Ten fell during this advance.

to the north-east. Suddenly from the eastern slope of the Salderpoort Kopjes two Boer guns opened a hot fire upon the advancing troops of Broadwood, who were ordered to retire out of range; and P Battery came into action to silence the hostile artillery. The Cavalry fell back at a walk, but had not gone far before a sharp fusillade burst out on their left from some Boers who had been concealed in a fold of the ground. Captain De Crespigny, of the 2nd Lifeguards, and two men of the Blues were badly wounded, and the brigade retired to the kopje which they had occupied after the enemy opened fire from the farm. Rimington's Horse, supported by other Mounted Infantry of Alderson's Brigade, now galloped forward and attacked the enemy; and P Battery, which was still engaged with the Boer guns at Salderpoort, was brought back in hot haste to their support, General French himself catching hold of one of the leaders of a gun team, and striving by main force to drag the exhausted brutes forward. Few as were their numbers, the Boers made a brave show, and an hour elapsed before the movement of the Mounted Infantry and the advance of Gordon and Ridley cleared the ground to the eastward and secured an open line of advance upon Salderpoort.

Here a tedious fight had been for some time in progress. While the Cavalry had been endeavouring to feel their way through the invisible lines of Mausers the whole of the troops on the south bank had slowly converged on Poplar Grove Drift. Towards 8 a.m. General Tucker, who had been forbidden to advance until the 6th Division and the Cavalry had developed their attack, moved the 14th Brigade, covered by its batteries and mounted infantry, towards Table Mountain, drawing a harmless shell fire from the enemy's guns on the ridges east of that hill. These withdrew before the Brigade Division could come into action; and the Infantry, inclining to the left, now advanced parallel with the Modder in fighting formation. At about 10 a.m. one of the batteries opened fire on a farmhouse near the bank, about half a mile in front of the rocky outcrop held by the Heidelbergers, and another shelled Table Mountain, which the enemy had almost evacuated. An hour later Chermside's advanced troops occupied the farm without opposition; and

De Wet, who had been watching the action from the Signal Kopje south of Poplar Grove Drift, ordered the detachments holding the trenches and rocks between the river and the kopjes to retire, covering the retreat with a rearguard. By noon the whole of the Boer army was withdrawing east of the Signal Kopje, and accompanied by the foreign attachés [1] followed its waggons up the left bank of the Modder. Of the character of that retreat De Wet's own words are sufficiently descriptive: "Again I was confronted with the baleful influence of Cronje's surrender. A panic had seized my men. Before the English had even got near enough to shell our positions to any purpose the wild flight began. Soon every position was evacuated. There was not even an attempt to hold them, though some of them would have been almost impregnable. It was a flight such as I had never seen before and shall never see again.

"I did all I could, but neither I nor my officers were able to prevent the burghers from following whither the waggons and guns had already preceded them. I tried every means. I had two of the best horses that a man could wish to possess, and I rode them till they dropped. All was in vain. It was fortunate for us that the advance of the English was not very rapid. Had it been so, everything must have fallen into their hands." [2]

Luckily for the Boer army, a few hundred of its men remained behind to cover its flight, and fought a rearguard action with great boldness and skill. Some of these we have already seen opposing the Cavalry; the remainder held stoutly to the Salderpoort Kopje, and, supported by the two guns whose fire had surprised Broadwood, succeeded for three hours in checking the pursuit of Tucker's and Le Gallais' Mounted Infantry. By the time they evacuated their position only two hours of daylight remained; and from the captured hills the disorderly mob of horsemen and waggons could be seen streaming eastwards out of reach of effective pursuit.

It is not easy to understand why the Mounted Infantry were delayed so long. Following slowly upon the track of the retiring burghers,

[1] Colonel Gourko's waggon broke down and with its owner fell into the hands of the pursuers.

[2] "Three Years' War," p. 69.

Tucker's Colonials crossed the abandoned trenches between the kopjes and the river, and towards 2 p.m. were approaching Salderpoort. About the same time Le Gallais, who at 9.40 a.m. had preceded the advance of the Guards and had followed step by step the withdrawal of the enemy along the eastern arm of Table Mountain, also came in line with Tucker's horsemen, so that nearly 1,000 mounted men must have been within striking distance of the enemy's position on the river-bank early in the afternoon. Yet whether because they were without artillery, or because, in compliance with "the general idea," they were still awaiting the advance of the Cavalry, no united attack took place. A frontal attack of one squadron of Kitchener's, unsupported by a turning movement to the south, was repulsed, and at 2.30 p.m. the Colonials were still hovering in front of Salderpoort. The 14th Brigade, the Guards, and the 6th Division were far behind amongst the kopjes and on the plain, and the Field Artillery not yet arrived. Some distance to the southward Porter was advancing towards Salderpoort; further to his right were Ridley and Gordon; further away still Broadwood and Alderson were attacking the few Boers who had interrupted their progress towards the river.

At this moment the 2nd Mounted Infantry Brigade arrived upon the scene. Preceding the 6th Division, Martyr's scouts had reached Table Mountain at 11 a.m. and found it abandoned. At 1 p.m. he had received an order from Lord Roberts, despatched early in the morning, to advance to Poplar Grove Drift without delay. Arriving there at 2.30 p.m., he watered his horses and was then ordered to turn the Salderpoort Kopjes from the southward and gain the river in their rear.

Accompanied by four field guns, he moved south-east, turned the position with his main body, and found it evacuated, coming as he advanced under the fire of a gun beyond the river. By this time, however, French was close behind, and a long line of Horse Artillery under Colonel Davidson opened fire over the heads of the Mounted Infantry. The Boer gun was withdrawn, the last snipers galloped away to the eastward; and about 4 p.m., without attempting a further pursuit, the

CROSSING A DRIFT.

combined Cavalry and Mounted Infantry moved down to the river, and there bivouacked. Broadwood, who an hour earlier had had to report that his horses were unable to move, halted at the pan where Gordon had watered; late in the evening he received orders to march to Poplar Grove Drift, which he reached at midnight. The rest of the army bivouacked in the plain between the kopjes and the river, the Guards at a dam south-east of the drift, the 6th Division and the 14th Brigade near the drift itself.

It had been a very long and tiring day for the Infantry, who, without firing a single shot, had marched in extended formation over distances varying from 22 to 12 miles with constant changes of direction which had severely tried the flank companies. The Naval Brigade and the long baggage trains halted some distance in the rear, the converging columns being much confused and congested owing to the narrowness of the defile along the river. No food or blankets reached the troops, and worn out and hungry they lay down to pass a sleepless night in the bitter cold.

On the north bank Colvile's troops bivouacked behind the Slaagtekraal Kopjes, after obtaining, small though it was, the only definite success of the day. The advance of his infantry immediately following on the receipt of Lord Roberts's order had met with no serious opposition. Smith-Dorrien moved into the valley between the Leeuw Kop and the Blue Hill, and with the loss of one man of the Shropshires, the only infantryman hit during the day, reached and occupied Poplar Farm, north-east of the Kop. Two companies of Shropshire Light Infantry then wheeled to the southward, and surmounting the steep reverse slope of the hill in momentary expectation of a heavy fire, found the summit abandoned. Here at 1 p.m. they captured a 9-pounder which earlier in the day had shelled the Naval 12-pounders on Cactus Knoll. About two hours afterwards the Highland Brigade passed through the trenches connecting Leeuw Kop with the river and reached Poplar Grove Drift, where they were joined later by the Gordon Highlanders and the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. These battalions had marched round the back of the Leeuw Kop, and now took up an outpost line facing east.

The main body of the Shropshire Light Infantry made a wider detour to the eastwards in pursuit of Boers, who, after the capture of the Leeuw Kop, had abandoned the Blue Hill and retreated southwards across Smith-Dorrien's front. But without field artillery, and with the Mounted Infantry still engaged with the Boshof Commando about Panfontein, it was impossible to intercept them; and by 5 p.m., when Roberts's Horse at last moved eastwards along the south face of Blue Hill, all De Wet's detachments on the right bank had recrossed the Modder at Rooi Drift and joined in the general retreat to Abraham's Kraal. Following in their track, the Shropshire Light Infantry struck the river at the same point, coming as they did so under a sharp fire from a few of the enemy who still lingered on the north of the stream. The battalion then fell back in the dark to Poplar Grove, after covering over 20 miles. Colvile's main object, the interception of the Boer retreat on the right bank, of course went unfulfilled, the Cavalry not having pressed the enemy so closely as to force them to cross the river.

The results of the day were extremely small and disappointing, all the more so because the hurried retreat of the enemy showed the extent of his demoralisation. To this factor, however, they owed their safety, for the rapid abandonment of their positions, a phenomenon on which Lord Roberts had not calculated, rendered the converging movement of no effect. The German General Staff account criticises the Field Marshal for not attacking at once and frontally with his Infantry so as to hold the Boers fast while the Cavalry worked round their rear. It is possible that something might have been gained by a bolder employment of the Guards and 14th Brigade at dawn, but the experience of the 6th Division, which was close to the enemy's position at daybreak and yet never fired a shot, seems to point to a different conclusion. Whatever course had been taken we greatly doubt whether the Boers would have allowed the infantry to come to hand-grips so soon as they were aware of the turning movement of French. Other critics hold the view that in keeping the different brigades and divisions under his personal control on so wide a field of battle Lord Roberts was attempting the impossible, and that had subordinate commanders being allowed

more latitude, the mounted troops attached to the infantry might have played a more active part. The evidence on this point is at present too scanty for generalisation, nor does there seem much reason for supposing that if any such error of principle was committed, it affected the course of the action in any decisive degree. The hasty retreat of the enemy left little scope for individual initiative. On the other hand it is certainly possible that a freer use of the Mounted Infantry would have been made if the infantry commanders had felt less bound by the general scheme to a stationary attitude until the moment when the Cavalry movement had succeeded. Over the general development of the battle, whether his scheme was rightly conceived or not, Lord Roberts was, of course, perfectly justified in keeping control. Had he realised that the Boers would abandon their positions at the first sign of an outflanking movement, it is possible that his whole scheme of attack would have been different.

This error of judgment, which in view of the general tactics of the enemy up to March 7th was a natural one, affected the whole of his calculations, and made the capture of the Boer force impracticable. On the other hand there is no doubt that had the Cavalry movement been more effective great results would still have been attained. It remains to be decided how far the ineffectiveness of French's movement was attributable to the conditions, how far to failures of leadership.

Putting aside the question as to whether the halt at Damfontein before dawn was really necessary—for it is perfectly arguable that a more advanced position at daybreak would have been neutralised by an earlier retreat on the part of the enemy and by the increased exhaustion of the horses owing to the longer march in the dark [1]—we must again

[1] Colonel Pilcher in his book, "Some Lessons from the Boer War" (p. 108), emphasises the inconveniences of a start in the dark. Referring to Poplar Grove (pp. 122–3) he says:—"On the afternoon preceding the battle of Poplar Grove, my regiment was ordered to march from Koodoosrand Drift to Osfontein, where waggons were distributed to us. Forage and rations, which had only just arrived from the rail, were not issued until late. The whole of the night was taken up in distributing these and in loading them up, for such work proceeds slowly by night. At 3 a.m. we started, and groped about in the dark for some time, without making much real headway. The consequence was that by the evening of the next day, when a vigorous pursuit might have reaped a great harvest, horses

refer to the position of affairs at 10 a.m., which in spite of the rapidity of the Boer retreat and the growing exhaustion of the horses was still favourable to the Cavalry. At that time and for fully an hour later Boer waggons were passing along the road towards Salderpoort, a large number of horsemen were still to the west of that point, and the right of the Cavalry Division held a good position within half a dozen miles of the river bank and the flank of the retiring enemy. To eye-witnesses on the ridge and at the Middlepunt Farm it appeared that a continuation of the forward movement from the right would have ensured the capture of the convoy and possibly of a good number of prisoners as well, for at that moment the Boers were not far enough to the east to have opposed the advance of two or three brigades of mounted troops and three or four batteries of Horse Artillery.

As has been remarked, one reason why this course was not adopted was French's absence on the left flank, which prevented him from seeing the position of affairs on the right. He had advanced in the full expectation of finding the bulk of the enemy in position on Table Mountain and engaged with the Infantry. Instead of this, no infantry were in sight and the Boers were moving into the plain position, but seemed about to attack him. At this critical moment the condition of his horses pressed upon him with overwhelming force. The animals had not suddenly and absolutely broken down; it was the knowledge of their weakness which cramped his initiative. The leader who at Colesberg had been remarkable for the boldness with which he had "slung his troops out" over the widest of fronts, who by his rapidity had demoralised the enemy at the Riet and at Klip Drift, who had dared to

and men were stone cold. . . . If it had been possible to bring horses and men to the place we reached in the afternoon, without their having been subjected to the same fatigue (most of it undergone before we had proceeded three miles) the results of the day might have been very different." In the matter of rations and transport the Cavalry seem to have been rather better off—a hot meal, for instance, was served out before the division started—but the reference to "groping about in the dark" is significant. In estimating the advantages of a night movement the effect of the extra fatigue which is sure to show itself later must be taken into consideration. In the instance of Poplar Grove another disadvantage of a night start, namely that horses will not drink before dawn, does not seem to have been present, for water, as we have seen, was procurable at Kalkfontein an hour and a half after sunrise.

throw himself on Cronje's line of retreat with a single brigade, now felt that with his loss of mobility his chief weapon had been snatched from his hand. Not daring to leave a part of his force exposed to the blows of a more mobile enemy, he massed the Division to the left to meet an attack which it is tolerably safe to say would never have been driven home; and which, had he been more confident in the powers of his troops, he would have been content to check with a portion of his forces only. In acting thus he left his enemy's line of retreat unassailed, lost his hold of the strategic flank, and made it comparatively easy for the Boers to form a line to cover their retirement.

From this initial error of direction sprang most of his subsequent difficulties. A few hundred Boers brought the advancing line to a standstill, reoccupied the farm, and harassed the Division with a sharp sniping fire, with which the Cavalry, armed with the short-range carbine, found it very difficult to cope. Later on the turning movement which should have been made at the beginning was carried out, but at a late hour and in face of a good deal of opposition.

To General French's sense of the impotence of his horses is mainly ascribable the failure of the operation. To this was due the keeping together of the troops in heavy masses, to this the fact that 5,000 horsemen with 42 guns were held fast for several hours by a few hundred riflemen and two or three guns, experiencing losses of about 1 per cent.,[1] and probably not inflicting twenty casualties upon their opponents.

Of how much exertion the horses were actually capable at 10 a.m. cannot of course be stated accurately. Over 200 had to be left behind or died of exhaustion during the day; and at 3 p.m. Broadwood had to report that his animals could not move another step. As one eye-witness put it: "After 8 a.m. the horses could only trot, after midday they could merely walk." Nevertheless the subsequent course of the action seems to show that in spite of their fatigue they were able to cover longer distances than the continuation of the right outflanking movement would in the first instance have necessitated, and that a direct

[1] About fifty casualties—see table at end of chapter.

advance from Middlepunt not only afforded the best chance of inflicting a heavy blow upon the enemy but might in some degree have lightened the labours of the animals themselves.

Thus much as regards the feasibility of the movement. Of course it would be unreasonable to strictly bind our judgment of General French's leadership by such calculations. Had he been on the right flank at the moment when the farm was occupied, and had seen what those in its neighbourhood saw, it is possible that he would have thought like them. On the opposite flank, with no means of knowing the extent of the enemy's demoralisation, with a keen sense of his horses' condition and ignorant of what might be required of them during the day, it is not wonderful that he inclined to the safer course and preferred to husband their failing powers with a view to future contingencies, rather than to anticipate such by their swift and ruthless employment. The risks, in a word, appeared to him great, the chances of a proportionate success too small. In so choosing it would appear that he lost a great opportunity. At the same time due allowance must be made for the exceptionally difficult conditions under which he had to take his decision. How heavily they must have weighed upon him can only be realised by those who have filled the most arduous post of a leader of a great body of Cavalry, the post which next to that of the Commander-in-Chief himself makes the heaviest calls on the soldier's capacity for enterprise, energy and vigilance.

It is possible that the length of front controlled by a single man also operated unfavourably to the sustained and vigorous action of the Cavalry. Not that a wide extension was in itself undesirable; on the contrary, the error at Poplar Grove was, if anything, in the opposite direction. But there is obviously a great difference between the management of a long line controlled by the orders of one commander and the assignment to its separate portions of definite tasks in executing which they are allowed a free hand. In the first case the subordinates feel bound to wait for orders; in the second, greater individual initiative is expected and obtained. At Poplar Grove, no doubt in accordance with General French's own sense of the necessity

of keeping the Division in hand, the system of a single control appears to have been maintained throughout the day. The brigadiers seem to have waited — were probably obliged to wait — for instructions; and General French, who had under his command a front from three to five miles in length, could not possibly overlook so wide a field and seize the fleeting chances as they offered themselves. His absence from the right flank at the time when the farm was occupied by the 10th Hussars is a case in point. Uncertain of the strength of the opposing enemy, and fettered by want of orders, the different parts of the Division acted slowly and half-heartedly. The problem as to how soon subordinate commanders should be left to act for themselves has always been, and still more in the future will be, a very difficult one; at Poplar Grove its solution seems hardly to have been happy. The result was frequent halts and loss of opportunities. The remark of one of the foreign attachés, "The Cavalry walked when it should have galloped, and galloped when it should have walked," was, like most criticisms of the kind, not strictly fair, but it contained a part of the truth. We are inclined to attribute this largely to the tendency to wait for orders, the tardiness with which those orders arrived, and their unsuitability to the actual situation when they came.

If these criticisms are beside the mark, if the Cavalry Division and its leaders really acted with vigour in the face of unsurmountable difficulties, then indeed the outlook for the arm is not encouraging. We venture to think otherwise. Allowing for the great and undeniable disadvantages under which the Cavalry laboured, the want of an adequate rifle and the weakness of their horses, it would appear that the main causes of the failure were the difficulties of single command on so wide a front, the misconception of the situation at the moment when the advanced troops of Broadwood occupied the farm and the ridge, and more than all, the cramping influence that the knowledge of his horses' condition exercised on General French himself. We do not pretend that all these unfavourable elements could have been immediately or effectively dissipated, but we do maintain that

to their presence, and not to the difficulties of the tactical situation, was due the escape of the Boers from Poplar Grove.[1]

[1] CASUALTIES AT POPLAR GROVE.

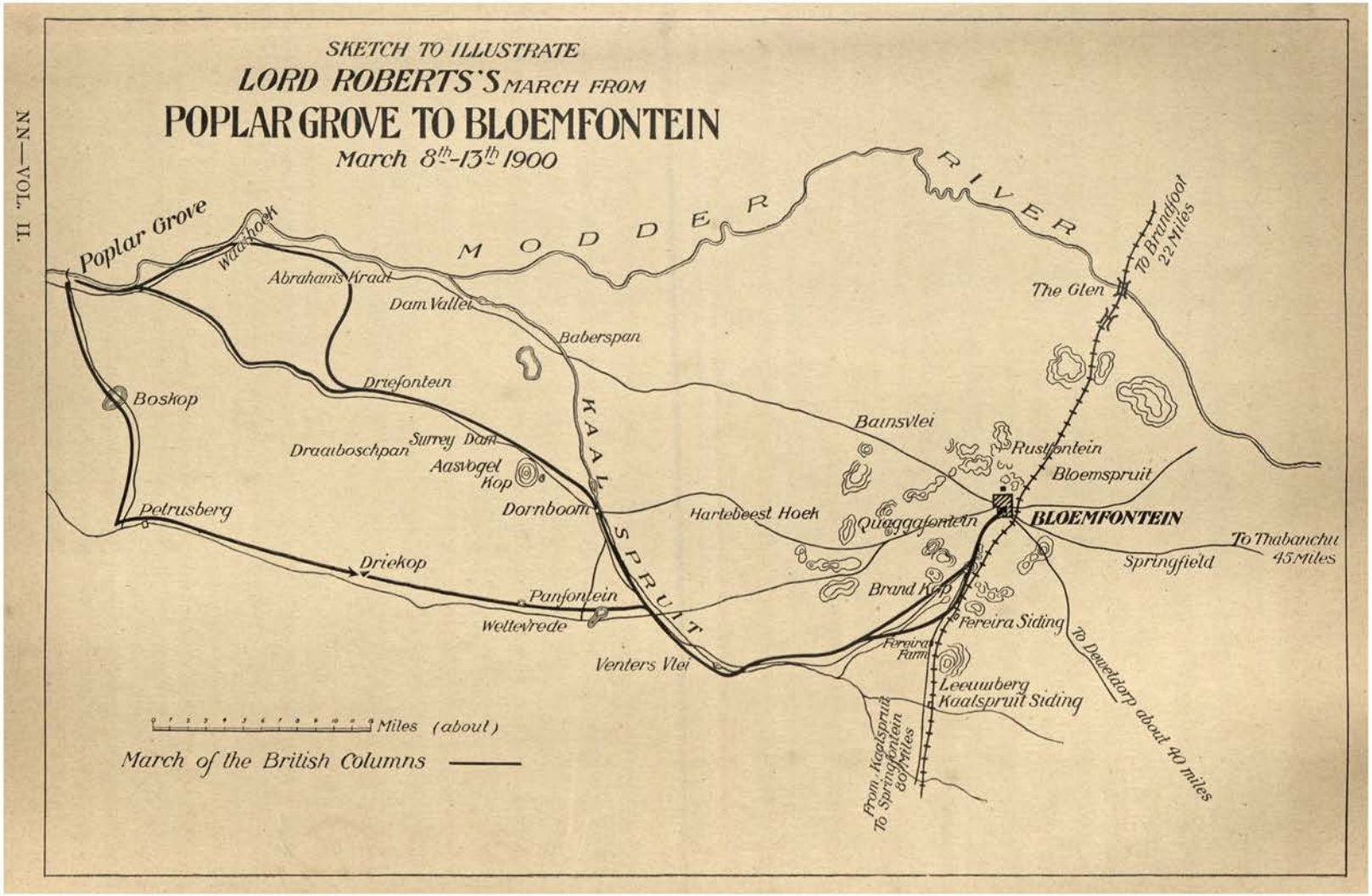
	Officers.			Men.		
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.
Household Cavalry... ...	—	1	—	1	3	—
10th Hussars	—	—	—	—	5	—
12th Lancers	1	1	—	1	—	—
9th Lancers...	—	—	—	—	15	—
16th Lancers	—	—	—	—	1	—
New South Wales Mounted Infantry	—	—	—	—	2	—
Roberts's Horse	—	—	—	—	1	—
Grahamstown Volunteers ...	1	—	—	—	—	—
3rd Mounted Infantry ...	—	—	—	—	2	—
5th Mounted Infantry ...		—	—	—	2	—
4th Mounted Infantry ...	—	—	—	—	—	1
8th Mounted Infantry ...	—	—	—	—	2	—
Royal Horse Artillery ...	—	—	—	—	7	—
	2	2	—	2	40	1

CHAPTER XVIII

DRIEFONTEIN

APPARENT COLLAPSE OF BOER FORCES AFTER POPLAR GROVE—LORD ROBERTS DECIDES TO MARCH DIRECT ON BLOEMFONTEIN—HIS MARCH-TABLE—COMPOSITION OF COLUMNS—EXPECTATIONS OF AN UNOPPOSED ADVANCE—MOVEMENT OF FRENCH'S COLUMN TO WAAIHOEK—RECONNAISSANCES OF MARCH 9TH—BOERS REINFORCED BY ZARPS—THEIR POSITIONS—MORNING OF MARCH 10TH, ADVANCE OF LEFT COLUMN—ORDERS OF FRENCH—SCOBELL'S RECONNAISSANCE AND REPORT—CONTINUED ADVANCE OF LEFT COLUMN—IT HALTS—BOERS BEGIN TO MOVE SOUTHWARDS—PORTER CHECKED—ADVANCE OF THE HORSE ARTILLERY—ALDERSON—VIEWS OF FRENCH—GRAVITATION OF BOTH SIDES TOWARDS DRIEFONTEIN—MARTYR'S SEIZURE OF DRIEFONTEIN KOPJE—PORTER CLEARS THE CENTRAL RIDGE—HILLS IN REAR FOUND OCCUPIED BY BOERS—FRESH TURNING MOVEMENT OF CAVALRY—APPROACH OF 6TH DIVISION—INFANTRY AND BAGGAGE UNDER FIRE—PLAN OF ACTION OF FRENCH AND KELLY-KENNY—ESSEX AND WELSH REGIMENTS OCCUPY CATTLE KRAAL RIDGE—COME UNDER HEAVY FIRE—DISPOSITION OF INFANTRY AT 1 P.M.—THE CAVALRY AT DRIEFONTEIN KOPJE—CAVALRY MOVE SOUTHWARD TO OUTFLANK ENEMY—DESCRIPTION OF THE ENEMY'S MAIN POSITION—SITUATION AT 2 P.M.—KELLY-KENNY DECIDES TO ATTACK—THE MAIN ATTACK—BUFFS—WELSH REGIMENT—ESSEX—FIELD ARTILLERY—RESULT OF ACTION DOUBTFUL—LORD ROBERTS WARNS THE GUARDS TO PREPARE TO ATTACK—5 P.M., SUDDEN COLLAPSE OF THE DEFENCE—THE LAST CHARGE—THE WHITE FLAG INCIDENT—END OF THE INFANTRY FIGHT—ACTION OF THE CAVALRY—BROADWOOD DECIDES TO TURN SOUTHERN END OF POSITION—HIS CALCULATIONS—HIS PROGRESS—3 P.M., BROADWOOD REACHES SEVENSTER'S—SPROT ARRIVES IN SUPPORT—FRESH MEASURES OF BROADWOOD—ARTILLERY DUEL—RETIREMENT OF BOER GUN—2ND BRIGADE ADVANCES TO CUT OFF RETREATING BOERS—ESCAPE OF THE LATTER—BROADWOOD BIVOUACS AT SURREY DAM—PORTER AT DRAAIBOSCHPAN—FRENCH AND HIS CRITICS—FAILURE OF THE CAVALRY TO INTERCEPT BOER RETREAT—MANAGEMENT OF THE INFANTRY ATTACK—SPLENDID BEHAVIOUR OF INFANTRY—AND OF ZARPS—LOSSES ON BOTH SIDES—MORAL EFFECT OF THE VICTORY.

DEPRIVED of the fruits of victory by the precipitate retreat of the enemy, Lord Roberts halted to allow the transport time to rejoin the troops before continuing his march on Bloemfontein. Incomplete as had been the results of the engagement of the preceding day, they seemed to show that the enemy was momentarily not in a condition to offer serious opposition to his further advance. The collapse of the Boer force in the action, the frequent signs of rout which strewed the roads to the eastward, and the reports of desertion and disbandonment which reached


SKETCH TO ILLUSTRATE
LORD ROBERTS'S MARCH FROM
POPLAR GROVE TO BLOEMFONTEIN
March 8th-13th 1900
MODDER RIVER
Poplar Grove
Waschbank
Abrahams Kraal
Dam Vallei
Baberspan
Driefontein
Boskop
Draauboschpan
Surrey Dam
Aasvogel Kop
Dornboom
KAALSPRUIT
Petrusberg
Driekop
Panfontein
Wettevrede
Venters Vlei
Bainsvlei
Hartebeest Hoek
Quaggafontein
The Glen
To Brandfoor 22 Miles
Rustfontein
Bloemspruit
BLOEMFONTEIN
To Thabanchu 45 Miles
Springfield
Brand Kop
Pereira Siding
Pereira Farm
To Deweldorp about 40 miles
Leeuwberg
Kaalspruit Siding
From Kaalspruit To Springfontein 80 Miles
Miles (about)
March of the British Columns

the British headquarters convinced the Commander-in-Chief that the enemy's troops were fatally shaken, and that the best way to take advantage of his demoralisation was to march rapidly upon the capital without wasting time in the pursuit of the commandos already dissolving in his front. So confident was he that the beaten enemy was incapable of interfering with his movements during the next days that on the evening of the 9th he issued orders for a four days' advance in three parallel columns, assigning to each its daily halting place and so arranging the routes that at the end of that time the army would be concentrated at a day's march to the south and south-west of Bloemfontein.

His dispositions for the march were as follows :—

The left column, under General French,[1] was to move by the northern road along the left bank of the Modder, as far as Baberspan, and then, swinging to the south-east, through Dornboom and Venter's Vlei to Leeuwberg on the railway 10 miles south of Bloemfontein. It was to consist of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, Alderson's Mounted Infantry Brigade, and the 6th Division, with their accompanying horse and field artillery.

The centre column, under the command of Lord Roberts himself, was to march by Driefontein, Aasvogel Kop, and Venter's Vlei to Leeuwberg. It was composed of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, Martyr's and Le Gallais' Mounted Infantry Brigades, the 9th Division, and the Brigade of Guards with their artillery, the Naval Brigade and howitzers, the ammunition reserve, supply park, and the 7th Company of Royal Engineers. The concentration of all long-range guns on this road

[1] In his dispatch and in the evidence which he gave before the Royal Commission, Lord Roberts states that General French was in command. No one would gather from Lieut.-General Kelly-Kenny's dispatch that this was the case (see evidence given before the Commission, 16919). He begins by stating that his Division marched on the 10th in accordance with instructions from Army Headquarters, and that a Cavalry Brigade was in front. He speaks of riding forward to obtain from General French the result of the cavalry reconnaissances, of determining to alter the direction of his march, &c. The fact that General Kelly-Kenny was the senior officer made General French's position a delicate one. Throughout the day the various measures seem to have been more a matter of agreement than of command. It is possible that this caused delay, though there seems no reason for supposing that it appreciably altered the course of the action.

is partly accounted for by the fact that it was less affected by bad weather than those on its right and left.

The right column, under General Tucker, was to advance through Petrusburg, Driekop, and Panfontein or Weltverede to Venter's Vlei. It consisted of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, the 7th Division,[1] and Ridley's Mounted Infantry Brigade. Communication was to be maintained between the columns, the march front of which would vary between twenty and twelve miles. The 4th and 6th Mounted Infantry, with the 2nd Warwickshire[2] and 2nd Hampshire[3] Regiments, were to remain at Poplar Grove and Osfontein, to keep open communication with Kimberley until the last convoys had come up and the sick and wounded from the action of the 7th had safely crossed the Modder. They were then to rejoin their brigades. The supplies in hand, which were calculated to last until the line of communication by Norval's Pont should be opened, amounted to 20½ half-rations of biscuit, 30 half-rations of groceries, and three full days' fresh beef. The loss of transport at Waterval had by this time been replaced. In addition to about 11,000 mules, 604 ox waggons, drawn by 9,588 oxen, followed the army from Poplar Grove.

The issue of a march-table has been censured as in the first instance unnecessary, and as standing condemned by the event. We do not think that the measure itself proved of much practical importance, for the scheme was altered at the outset by the unexpected stubbornness of the Boer resistance at Driefontein, and was subjected to further modification during the following days. It was based of course on one of those misconceptions which are so common in war. Lord Roberts was misled by his information; he concluded that the demoralisation of the enemy was much greater than proved to be the case,[4] and in view of this and his great numerical superiority, he regarded himself as justified in issuing an order which made for rapidity of movement and convenience of supply, and was dictated by considerations other than

[1] The 15th Brigade did not rejoin the Division until after the occupation of Bloemfontein.

[2] 6th Division. [3] 7th Division.

[4] However, as De Wet himself shows (p. 77), he was not altogether wrong. Two commandos, those of Fauresmith and Jacobsdal, returned to their homes after Poplar Grove.

those which relate to manœuvres in presence of an enemy. It was of course obvious that if his primary assumption proved false his army would be at a disadvantage. For instance, it is possible that, if on the 10th it had marched along both banks of the Modder instead of along the southern one only, the Abraham's Kraal road might have been cleared without serious fighting. A river is an awkward obstacle to have on the flank of an advancing army; and the Modder, which bordered French's march, left him only one flank free for manœuvre. An alternative course, which would perhaps have accorded more nearly with Lord Roberts's own views, would have been to mass the bulk of the Cavalry on the right flank of his advance, where they could have covered it from an attack from the south, or operated against the rear of any Boer force which might oppose the march of the left wing on the roads to the north. But the applicability of both these measures rests upon the assumption that he expected serious fighting, which was not the case. Thinking as he did, the distribution of the army into three columns and the allotment of an equal proportion of mounted troops to each was a very natural arrangement, all the more so because, if the enemy did endeavour to oppose him, the resistance seemed as likely to come from the south as from the east. The main considerations which governed his choice of route he has himself explained. His first object was to reach the railway with the least possible delay. The well-founded report that the enemy contemplated resistance at Bainsvlei, 10 miles west of Bloemfontein, and the comparative openness of the country south of the capital, convinced him that the quickest and surest way of gaining his new line of supply was to keep his army south of the Modder, and abandoning the northern road at Baberspan, divert the march towards the south-east. What was the precise information upon which Lord Roberts relied is not known, although the course he adopted makes it pretty clear what its general drift must have been. And this all the more so because the reports of General French, whose troops alone were in touch with the enemy on the 8th and 9th, did not altogether justify the view that the advance would be uninterrupted. On the day after Poplar Grove his column had made a preliminary march of eleven miles along the Modder to Roodeport Farm and Waaihoek,

partly with the idea of pursuing the enemy, partly with the intention of relieving the congestion which prevailed round Poplar Grove.[1] On the morning of the 9th Major Scobell had reported that the hills near the river at Abraham's Kraal, and seven miles south-east of Waaihoek, *i.e.*, towards Driefontein, were strongly held, and that guns could be seen in position. Later in the day a squadron of the Carabineers reported that 2,000 of the enemy were moving north from Abraham's Kraal, and some of Rimington's Guides were sent across the river to watch them. It would appear that General French concluded from this information that the Transvaalers and Free Staters had split up and were retreating in different directions. Presumably he reported[2] in that sense to Lord Roberts, who adopted the same view and issued the orders detailed above, directing further[3] that if the enemy held on to the Abraham's Kraal kopjes the column should avoid them, and march straight to Baberspan, its allotted halting-place, across the flat ground between them and the ridges to the south. He was confident that if any of the enemy did remain to fight they would be too few seriously to impede his lieutenant's advance.

But for one fact then unknown, the assumption of the British Commander-in-Chief would probably have proved correct. This disturbing element was the arrival at Abraham's Kraal of about 700 of the Pretoria and Johannesburg Police. These Zarps, to whose natural stubbornness and skill with the rifle was added that discipline which the ordinary burghers lacked, had reached the Boer headquarters on the night of the retreat from Poplar Grove, at the very moment when the

[1] The 6th Division started at noon on the 8th, the 1st Cavalry Brigade three hours later. At the moment when Porter started Rimington's Guides were already at Roodepoort. The fact that the Cavalry started so late in the day, and after the Infantry, does not suggest that a pursuit was seriously contemplated. It seems probable that Rimington was pushed on early, in the hope of getting in touch with the retreating Boers, who had reached Abraham's Kraal, seven miles beyond Roodepoort, on the preceding evening; that failing to do this he reported the road clear as far as Roodepoort; and that the troops of French's column followed as far as that place in the order which happened to be most convenient, the Infantry preceding the Cavalry, who were delayed by the non-arrival of their supplies.

[2] See Goldmann, p. 142.

[3] *I.e.*, on the night of the 9th. He seems to have repeated this part of his instructions by helio on the following morning, when the Abraham's Kraal position was found to be occupied.

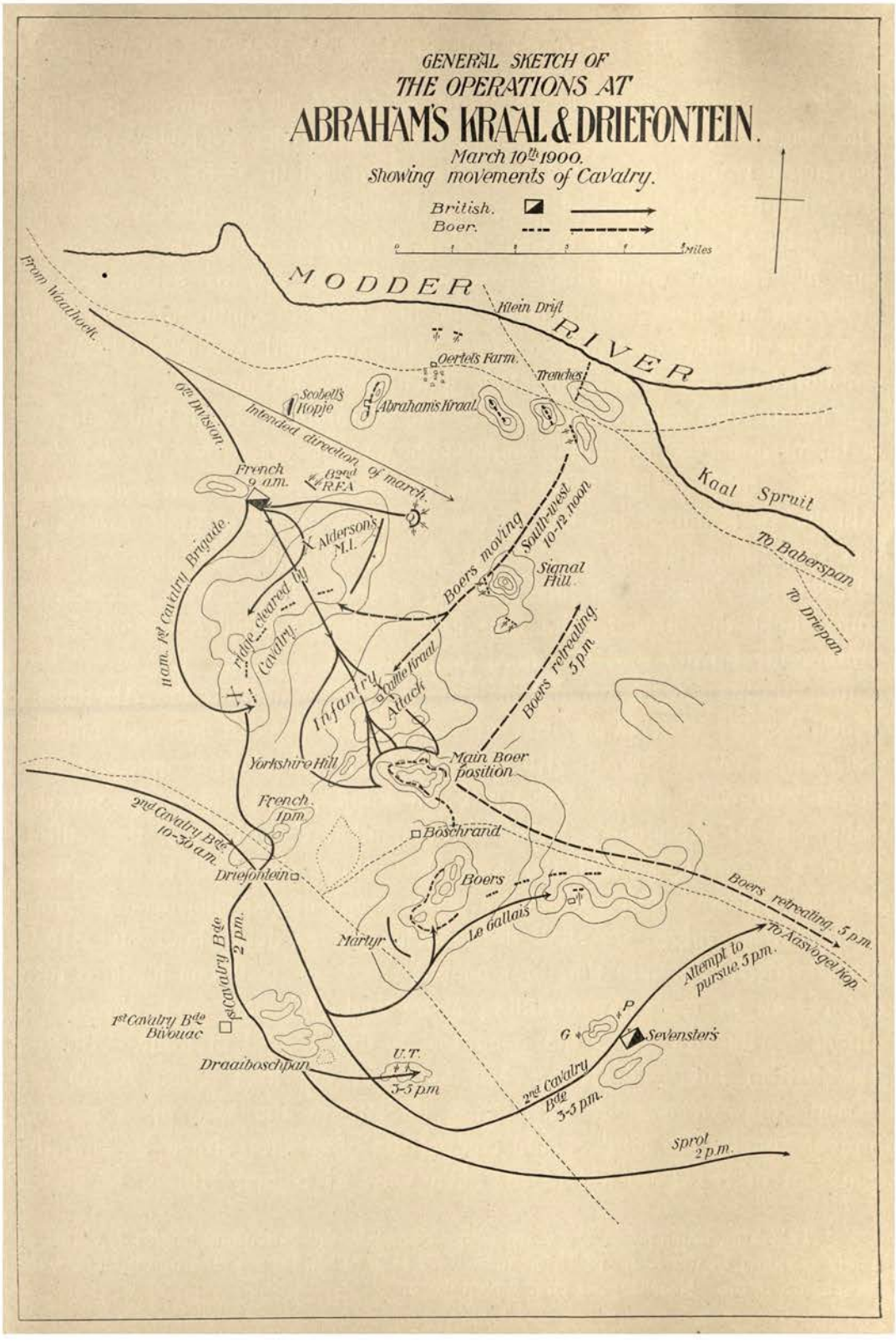
panic and confusion of the beaten army was at its height. "The burgers," says De Wet, "had but one desire—to get away." The greater part had given up all hope, and were streaming to the rear, in spite of the efforts of their leaders. Of the Heilbronn commando, nominally 200 strong, there remained only the field cornet and three men. But for those who were still ready to fight, the advent of the Zarps made a fresh stand possible. They formed a nucleus round which the bravest of their countrymen could rally, and from a military point of view were by far the most important portion of the men who fought two days later at Driefontein. On the morning of the 8th Delarey came up with other reinforcements; positions were chosen and defensive works begun, so that when De Wet, who had hastily ridden back to Bloemfontein to take measures for its defence, returned on the evening of March 9th, he found some 6,000 men with six or seven guns available to oppose the enemy's advance.[1] During his absence he had met the Presidents, who had urged upon him the necessity of making an attempt to save the capital.

The positions held by the Boers were typical of the Free State, the land of rolling veldt, half-dry waterpans, and low rocky bluffs. Seven miles east of Waaihoek, where the 1st Cavalry Brigade had bivouacked on the preceding days, and just south of the northern or river road, upsprung a low, flat kopje, rising about 150 feet above the level of the surrounding veldt, on whose western slope stood the stone enclosure called Abraham's Kraal. A mile to the eastward of this point the ground sank to the small wood round Oertel's Farm, and then, rising again, broke up into a rough group of hillocks of much the same elevation as that at Abraham's Kraal, which curved round to the south-east parallel to the road to Baberspan.[2]

North of the most eastern of these, blocking the space between the road and river, lay another kopje with Klein Drift, the only ford in the neighbourhood, about two miles to its west. This northern series of hills, extending from Abraham's Kraal to the left bank of

[1] A French attaché present with the enemy estimated their numbers at 8,000. The German official account speaks of 16 guns. This is surely an over-estimate.

[2] See general sketch of the operations at Abraham's Kraal and Driefontein, p. 550.


GENERAL SKETCH OF
THE OPERATIONS AT
ABRAHAM'S KRAAL & DRIEFONTEIN.
March 10th 1900.
Showing movements of Cavalry.
British.
Boer.
Miles
MODDER RIVER
Klein Drift
From Waathoek.
Oertel's Farm.
Trenches
Scobell's Kopje
Abraham's Kraal
6th Division.
Intended direction of march.
French 9 a.m.
82nd R.F.A.
Kaal Spruit
To Baberspan
To Driepan
Alderson's M.I.
South-west 10-12 noon
Boers moving
Signal Hill
11 a.m. 1st Cavalry Brigade.
ridge cleared by Cavalry.
Boers retreating 5 p.m.
Cattle Kraal
Infantry Attack
Yorkshire Hill
Main Boer position
French 1 p.m.
2nd Cavalry Bde 10-30 a.m.
Boschrand
Driefontein
Boers
Boers retreating 5 p.m.
To Aasvogel Kop.
Le Gallais
Martyr
1st Cavalry Bde 2 p.m.
Attempt to pursue 5 p.m.
1st Cavalry Bde Bivouac
P
G
Sevensters
U.T.
Draaiboschpan
3-5 p.m.
2nd Cavalry Bde 3-5 p.m.
Sprot 2 p.m.

the Kaal Spruit, formed the right wing of the enemy's position. The heights nearest the river and overlooking the road were heavily entrenched; and from the easternmost to Klein Drift ran a series of shelter-trenches and rifle-pits, well screened by the thick vegetation of the river bank. Had French followed the road originally assigned to him, his column would have marched "like a row of cabbages," as Frederick the Great would have said, into a defile commanded on both sides by deadly cross-fire. Here were stationed the main body of the burghers and Zarps with four guns and a Maxim.

About two miles south-west of the Abraham's Kraal Hill a series of undulations (X) extending southwards were occupied by a few burgher patrols. Still further to the south, between seven and ten miles from Abraham's Kraal, a number of the enemy occupied a kopje astride of the road assigned to the central British column and close to the Driefontein Farm, its intended halting place. Others, with one or two guns, held the hills to the east and south-east which overlooked the Boschrand Farm [1] and the more open ground beyond. In rear of the centre of this long front, and in some degree connecting the Abraham's Kraal kopjes with those east of Driefontein, was an isolated hillock, afterwards called Signal Hill. Situated at about three miles to the south-south-west of the Oertel's Farm kopjes, and four miles to the south-east of Abraham's Kraal, it commanded the whole of the rolling plain between itself and the long, low ridge (X) held by the Boer patrols, and was within distant artillery range of the hills near Driefontein. These ridges we shall describe in greater detail later on. It is here sufficient to note that they offered a series of positions hard to turn by reason of their far-extending spurs and shoulders and difficult of direct assault owing to the openness of the ground in front. Should the British fail to force or elect to avoid the hills round Abraham's Kraal, the Driefontein hills lying directly in the way of a turning movement to the south would compel the assailants either to run the gauntlet of the Boer fire in the plain west of Signal Hill, or to attack

[1] This farm, which lay in the sharp elbow formed by the Boschrand kopjes, is called in many accounts by the name of Driefontein. We shall call it, for the sake of distinction, the Boschrand Farm. Near it was a large melon-patch.

frontally, or to have recourse to a still longer and more circuitous movement to the south of Boschrand; all of which alternatives were likely to prove costly in time, in energy and perhaps in men. On the other hand the defenders, moving on shorter lines, could observe and anticipate the march of the British columns, which it was impossible to conceal in the open plains to the westward.

Such were the possibilities of the situation, though we do not suggest that they were foreseen by the enemy in the exact degree and sequence in which we have described them. On the contrary, it is pretty clear that they hoped and expected that French would not wheel to the southward, but march straight into the jaws of the trap at Abraham's Kraal, and that at first they only occupied the southern ridges on the chance of a British column trying to force its way by Driefontein. Of the plan of the advance in three columns they could have known nothing; but they probably assumed that Lord Roberts would repeat the manœuvre of Poplar Grove and endeavour to turn the position near the river. In the meantime they awaited the development of the British attack, holding, as was their wont, a long, partially prepared front, and trusting to their mobility to anticipate their assailants wherever they elected to strike.

The morning of the 10th dawned fresh and bright, and punctually at 6 a.m. the main body of French's column left its bivouacs and began to move eastward. As we have seen, the information sent in on the 9th had so far influenced Lord Roberts that he had already ordered French to avoid the river road if it was strongly held, and to move straight upon Baberspan across the open veldt. The latter determined overnight to adopt this plan, and at 4.30 a.m. had despatched Major Scobell with a squadron of the Greys and a company of Mounted Infantry, to reconnoitre the hills about Abraham's Kraal, and to take up a position ready to cover the flank of the movement. Pending the receipt of his report the column was directed to assemble at 6.45 at the junction of the Waaihoek track and the main road to Baberspan. The Cavalry Brigade under Colonel Porter, who at 6 a.m. had sent a second squadron of the Greys under Captain Maude towards Driefontein, was to cover the advance. He was to be followed by Alderson,

who in his turn was to precede the Infantry of the 6th Division. Behind the Infantry was to move the baggage.

The Cavalry had scarcely passed the road junction when Scobell's report arrived. At daybreak that officer had reached a small hill crowned by a stone enclosure about 2,000 yards west of the Abraham's Kraal kopje. Finding it unoccupied, he had pushed a reconnoitring party towards Abraham's Kraal. Within 400 yards of that point it had come under a heavy fire and had been obliged to fall back to the little hill, from which vantage point the enemy could be seen swarming over the ridges about Oertel's Farm. Two guns firing black powder opened upon Scobell from behind Abraham's Kraal and a third was located on the northern bank of the river. It was clear that the Boers intended to dispute the advance strongly.

When the message reached him, French was already moving half-right, towards the nek between the Abraham's Kraal kopje and the long broken ridge (X) to the south. He ordered Scobell to hold on and act as flank guard until he was relieved, and himself continued in the same direction; Alderson and the Cavalry extending on a broad front between the river-road and a low rocky bluff (V), which lay some distance on their right front. No special haste was made,[1] and it was after 8 a.m. when French, attended by his Staff, ascended the bluff to survey the ground. The mounted troops moved past him and dismounted a few hundred yards in front.

From French's standpoint the smoke of the guns behind Abraham's Kraal was clearly visible; and Boers could also be seen retiring from that point towards the Oertel's Farm hills. Scobell was now sharply engaged with snipers; and the advanced patrols of Porter's Brigade were exchanging shots with Boer riflemen on the rolling ground in front (X). A halt, presumably to await the report of the scouts, now took place; and it was 10 a.m. before French, who in the meantime had been joined by Kelly-Kenny, directed Colonel Alexander with two squadrons of the Scots Greys to get forward and seize the

[1] During the early part of the day the mounted troops never seem to have moved out of a walk.

low ridge south of the nek—an indispensable preliminary to an advance on Bakerspan. At the same time he sent two squadrons of Roberts's Horse to relieve Scobell, and detached a troop of cavalry to the southward to establish communication with the column of the centre. The Infantry, who in the meantime had rested and breakfasted some distance in rear of the Cavalry, recommenced their march about half an hour later.

French's orders had scarcely been despatched when a body of horsemen in regular formation was seen to gallop forward from Oertel's kopjes towards the ridges opposite Porter. French immediately sent off a galloper, directing that officer to hurry forward and anticipate this movement of the enemy; but before the Greys could approach the Zarps had occupied the hills to the south and opened fire with a pompom. Seeing that the Cavalry unaided were too weak to drive their opponents out, the British Commander now ordered Q Battery, escorted by a squadron and a company of Mounted Infantry, to advance down the hollow between the ridges and shell the enemy's positions. T Battery was sent to join Alexander's squadrons, and U moved northward to silence a gun on the northern bank which had just opened fire upon Scobell.

Q Battery trotted forward for two miles, and had just reached a point south of Abraham's Kraal, when it was suddenly brought to a halt by the fire of the pompom, 2,000 yards on its right front. Coming promptly into action, it silenced its opponent with the second shot,[1] and then wheeled to reply to Boer gunfire from the north and east. Here it remained during the whole day firing at all sorts of ranges towards nearly every point of the compass.

U Battery was not long in forcing the gun or guns on the northern bank to retire up stream out of range, and then went southward to rejoin T. Just before it moved the 82nd Field Battery, which Kelly-Kenny had sent forward at French's request, arrived in the same part of the field, and came under the fire of a pompom from the direction of the river. This was very soon silenced, and the 82nd,

[1] This gun seems to have retired southwards and afterwards to have taken part in the main action.

escorted by two squadrons of Roberts's Horse, came into action on or near Scobell's kopje, whence it endeavoured unsuccessfully to reach the guns near Oertel's Farm. In this position it was soon afterwards supported by a company of the 3rd Mounted Infantry Regiment, and in conjunction with these troops and Q Battery continued throughout the day to act as a flank guard to the march of the Cavalry and the 6th Division. Sniping went on during the whole time, and several units of the Mounted Infantry Brigade were engaged, but as the enemy made no attempt to close, and as Alderson's main body had been told off to escort its own baggage and that of the Cavalry, no serious fighting took place.

While the Mounted Infantry and the Artillery were in movement to cover the left, the main column was trending south-east. In spite of the efforts of Porter's Brigade the Mausers still rattled along the low undulations in front, and French, whose object was to avoid all engagements and reach his camping ground at Baberspan, directed Porter to move further to the southward and turn the Boer left, thinking that such a manœuvre would be the quickest way of clearing the enemy off the ridge in front, and of opening a path for the Infantry. At this time the Cavalry commander was still under the impression that the Boers in front of him were few in number, and had no intention of making a serious stand.

As a matter of fact the opposition, far from weakening, was growing stronger every hour. The southward trend of the British columns—for the 6th Division and the baggage, wheeling to the right out of range of the Oertel's Farm guns, were following Porter—was easily visible to the Boers, who now hurried in a succession of bands, large and small, from the river kopjes towards the Driefontein hills, in order to anticipate and confront the turning movement. On the southern flank fighting was already in progress. Before dawn, Martyr's Mounted Infantry, who were acting as escort to the Field Telegraph Section attached to the column of the centre, had marched off some distance in front of Broadwood's Brigade, with orders to lay the cable as it went along. The commanding officer was informed that the country was clear of the enemy, and, indeed, a march

disposition which placed the Telegraph Section in front of all the other troops is a sufficient proof of how absolute was the belief at headquarters that the road was safe. Early in the morning, however, the detachment stumbled on Boers occupying the Driefontein Kopje. The Telegraph Section and the baggage of Martyr's regiment narrowly escaped capture, and it was not until just before midday that he succeeded in obtaining a lodgment with one company on the western foot of Yorkshire Hill,[1] and with another on the south-western end of the Boschrand Kopjes. Further than this he could not advance, every attempt to do so being met by a heavy fire. Thus by 11 a.m. the area of the fight, which had begun with the appearance of Scobell near Abraham's Kraal, had spread southwards as far as Driefontein, towards which decisive point the forces of both sides were fast gravitating. But of the intentions of the enemy little was as yet known, nor did their countenance in the first collisions seem to prelude the obstinate struggle with which the day terminated.

In pursuance of French's orders Porter wheeled to the right, and arrived at the southern end of the central ridge (X) to find a few of the enemy still in front of him. After a short artillery preparation[2] he attacked the position with the squadron of the New South Wales Lancers; and under a spluttering fire from the further ridges[3] the dismounted troopers mounted the gentle slope and occupied the crest. It was now evident that the hills in rear were strongly held and French decided on a further turning movement which brought his right wing across the head of the central column. Two squadrons under Major Sprot were sent round to occupy the Driefontein Kopje, already held by Martyr, from which it was possible in some degree to enfilade with artillery the hills to the east. The remainder of Porter's Brigade moved up to the ridge already cleared, and held it until relieved by the Infantry. The horse batteries opened effectively from the same position. Thus by 11.30 a.m. the low crest between Abraham's Kraal and Driefontein was in French's hands. But the enemy were gathering fast on the hills to the south-east; the Boer guns on Signal Hill were

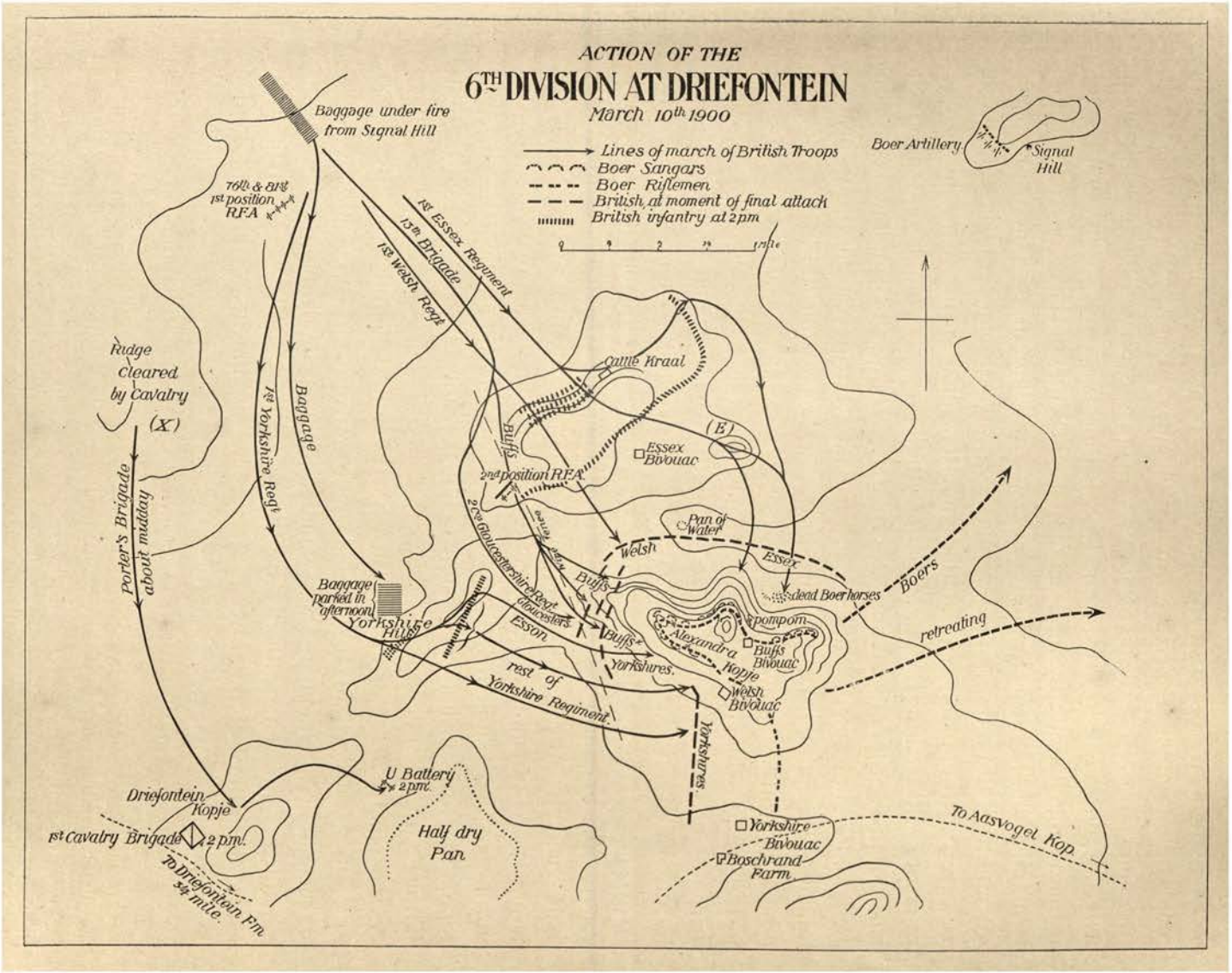
[1] See below. Also map (p. 558). [2] At first by T, afterwards by T and U.
[3] Probably the Cattle Kraal Ridge and Yorkshire Hill.

shelling the Cavalry at a range of over 7,000 yards, and their nearer guns and riflemen opened vigorously as the horsemen, continuing their movement towards the Driefontein Kopje, crossed the low ground between the ridges. The 6th Division, now moving over the rolling undulations cleared by the mounted men, was also under shell fire from Signal Hill. Despite the extreme length of the range the fire was well directed, and several shells fell among the baggage as it crept across the plain behind the Infantry. Luckily the height of the trajectory and the defectiveness of the ammunition prevented much damage, the shrapnel bursting too high to be effective, and the common shell for the most part failing to detonate. Nevertheless, one or two animals were hit, and to divert the enemy's aim the 81st Battery moved outwards from the line of march and exposed itself to the hostile shells while the baggage wheeled to the right and moved south-west to get out of range. After some twenty minutes of heavy shell-fire, to which the shortness of its fuzes prevented it from replying [1] the 81st rejoined the 76th, and with it advanced to rejoin the Infantry.

In the meantime General Kelly-Kenny had ridden up on to the ridge held by the Cavalry, and had arranged with French that the mounted troops should continue their turning movement past Driefontein and Boschrand while the Infantry contained the enemy in front. It was hoped that this would clear the way for the 6th Division without serious fighting; and at the moment the probability of its success was heightened by the fact that Broadwood, whose brigade had approached Driefontein soon after Martyr, had already been ordered by Lord Roberts to proceed in the same direction as that which French had proposed to take. It remained for General Kelly-Kenny to occupy positions which would secure the safety of the Division until the movement of the Cavalry had developed.

From his station on the ridge (X) the commander of the 6th

[1] Later in the war, partly no doubt as a concession to public opinion in England, the Field Artillery was provided with a longer fuze, which together with an increased elevation of the muzzle, enabled it to burst shrapnel at as great a range as the field guns of the Boers. The material effect of the shells, owing to their high trajectory and low velocity, was extremely small, but there is no doubt that on some occasions they produced a useful moral effect.


ACTION OF THE
6TH DIVISION AT DRIEFONTEIN
March 10th 1900
Lines of march of British Troops
Boer Sangars
Boer Riflemen
British, at moment of final attack
British infantry at 2pm
Boer Artillery
Signal Hill
Baggage under fire from Signal Hill
76th & 81st 1st position R.F.A.
1st Essex Regiment
13th Brigade
1st Welsh Regt
Ridge Cleared by Cavalry
(X)
Porter's Brigade about midday
1st Yorkshire Regt
Baggage
Cattle Kraal
Buffs
(E)
Essex Bivouac
2nd position R.F.A.
2 Cos Gloucestershire Regt
Pan of Water
Welsh
Essex
Buffs
dead Boer horses
Boers
Baggage parked in afternoon
Yorkshire Hill
Gloucesters
Esson
Buffs
pompom
Alexandra Kopje
Buffs Bivouac
retreating
Yorkshires.
rest of Yorkshire Regiment.
Welsh Bivouac
Yorkshires.
U Battery 2pm.
Driefontein Kopje
1st Cavalry Brigade 2 p.m.
To Driefontein Fm 3/4 mile.
Half dry Pan
Yorkshire Bivouac
Boschrand Farm
To Aasvogel Kop.

Division looked across a depression about two miles broad towards the ridges held by the enemy. They lay roughly in two lines one behind the other. The lowest and nearest consisted of two hills joined by a nek. On the northernmost of these was a cattle-kraal. On the southernmost, afterwards known as Yorkshire Hill, Martyr's Mounted Infantry had, as we know, effected a lodgment. This was separated from the Driefontein Kopje, whither the main body of Porter's brigade was now moving, by a second depression about a mile in width. About 1,200 yards behind the first line of hills rose the main Boer position, afterwards called the Alexandra Kopje. It ran east and west for about a mile and a half, its northern front, which rose abruptly from the plain to a height of about fifty feet, being indented by steep-sided horseshoe-like hollows. Its southern face looked towards the Boschrand ridge. The crest was heavily sangared, especially that portion which fronted towards the Cattle Kraal Ridge, and the horns of the deep recess at its eastern extremity. Its western point, running down towards Yorkshire Hill, was covered by a similar series of breast-works. The ground between the Alexandra Kopje and the advanced positions was absolutely bare, a small pan of water in its centre forming the only noticeable depression. Two or three machine guns and pompoms were dotted along the ridge; but the Boer field guns were principally at Signal Hill or on the kopjes to the east of the main position.

Enough could be seen of the two lines of hills and of the effect of the fire of the Horse Artillery to warrant the presumption that the occupation of the first line would not be strongly contested. General Kelly-Kenny determined to seize it with his nearest battalions, and there to await the effect of the outflanking advance of the Cavalry. When his orders reached the Division it was still crossing the ground cleared by Porter. The Welsh Regiment of Stephenson's Brigade formed the advanced guard; behind it came the Essex; on its right the Yorkshire Regiment acted as right flank guard. The 13th Brigade and the two field batteries came next, the Buffs leading, followed by the Gloucester Regiment. The two remaining battalions, the West Ridings and the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, were entrusted

with the care of the baggage, which was thought to be exposed to an attack from the direction of the river.

It was a little before midday when Stephenson was directed to deploy his brigade and seize the enemy's advanced positions. The two field batteries came into action behind the Infantry, the Essex Regiment moved up on the left of the Welsh, the Yorkshire Regiment on its right, the objective of the first two battalions being the Cattle Kraal Ridge, that of the Yorkshire Regiment the hill called after it. The horse batteries on the Driefontein Kopje swept the ridges to the eastward, on which the enemy, who now began to leave the Cattle Kraal Hill, were seen clustering thickly.

The shrapnel of the field batteries was not long in producing its effect. The rifle fire, which had been poured upon the advanced companies of the Infantry, slackened; and at 1 p.m. the Welsh and Essex reached the Cattle Kraal Ridge without suffering serious loss. Scarcely, however, had the leading companies topped the crest than they came under a furious Mauser fire from the heights beyond; and a pompom placed on the right centre of the enemy's front inflicted some loss on the left of the Essex. The rearward companies of both battalions took shelter from the frontal fire under the steep north-western side of the hill near the kraal, but they remained exposed to the fire of the gun on Signal Hill, which poured shell along their left flank and rear, and but for its defective ammunition would have caused many casualties. Here, however, the bulk of the infantry were obliged to remain; while those men who had already reached the crest-line sought cover amongst the boulders and began replying to the fire from the sangared kopjes opposite them. So placed, they occupied fully a mile of front; the left on the ridge itself suffering considerably from the fire of Boers ensconced behind an underfeature (E) 1,000 yards away; the right wing extending some little way into the plain between the Cattle Kraal Ridge and the Yorkshire Hill, towards which the 1st Yorkshire Regiment, forming the right of the 18th Brigade, was now moving. The field batteries advanced to the nek between the hills, and at a range of about 1,800 yards engaged the Boer

artillery. The Gloucester Regiment and the Buffs remained in reserve.

General Kelly-Kenny had now carried out his share of the undertaking, and anxiously awaited the effect of the Cavalry movement against the Boer flank and rear. While the preliminary movements of the infantry were in progress, French seems to have been on the Driefontein Kopje, behind which stood Porter's Brigade partially protected from the shells that were exploding along its crest. Between 1 and 2 p.m., about the time when the Welsh and Essex reached the Cattle Kraal Ridge, the commander of the Cavalry division ordered U Battery into the open near the half-dry pan south-east of the kopje, so as to enfilade the sangers visible on the heights to the east. Covered by Martyr's Mounted Infantry on Yorkshire Hill, the guns advanced and at once came under a very hot fire from the crests and hollows of the southern face of the Alexandra Kopje. But, aided by the Queenslanders, whom Colonel Martyr sent forward, the guns soon silenced this fire and drove the enemy to abandon their western defences. All was now quiet, and General French, who throughout held to the idea that he had only to deal with a rearguard, seems to have concluded that the Boers were about to retreat. At 2 p.m. a message [1] from him reached Kelly-Kenny urging on that ground the prompt resumption of the march; and about the same time Major Sprot received orders to go round the Boschrand Ridge with five squadrons of Cavalry and T Battery, get in touch with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and place himself at Broadwood's disposal. Half an hour later U Battery, which, on seeing the Infantry advance, had again searched the sangars and the reverse slopes of the main Boer position with shrapnel, followed Sprot; and French himself left the Driefontein Kopje and went southward with the remainder of Porter's Brigade. The Yorkshire Regiment had in the meantime lined with three companies the crest of Yorkshire Hill, and began firing volleys into the enemy's sangars. The remaining half battalion halted under the shelter of the slope behind.

[1] The German official account (p. 92) speaks of an *order*. The message, so far as we can learn, was not intended in that sense. As a matter of fact it does not seem to have influenced General Kelly-Kenny's action.

An hour and a half had passed since Stephenson's Infantry had reached the Cattle Kraal Ridge, and still the enemy's fire showed no sign of slackening. The Essex, who had detached several companies to cover their left rear towards Signal Hill, were still heavily engaged with the Boers on the underfeature (E); the Welsh, whose firing line seems from time to time to have been reinforced, were lying under the full blast of the fire from the Alexandra Kopje. Barely three hours of daylight remained, and there was no sign of the success of the Cavalry movement. It would be late before it could develop, and it was not certain that it would succeed. If the 6th Division failed to advance, the march of the whole army would be interrupted, the columns would be unable to reach their intended bivouacs, and the enemy would be left in possession of strong positions, the attack on which would entail further fighting and perhaps heavy loss. Indeed, the action had reached a stage at which it was practically impossible to break it off. The firing line of both the Welsh and Essex Regiments was suffering considerably, and a withdrawal, apart from its grave moral effect, was certain to prove costly. The 6th Division was committed to the attack of the position, and the sooner it was captured the better. The action of the Cavalry later in the day might serve to neutralise a repulse or to enhance a victory.

So thought General Kelly-Kenny when, shortly before 3 p.m., he directed General Stephenson to attack. Orders quickly reached the troops; and soon after that hour the two advanced battalions were pushing on under a murderous fire, the Essex trending somewhat to their left front towards the underfeature (E), the Welsh bringing their left shoulders up and making straight across the open for the main ridge. Of the Essex some companies remained intact; the whole of the Welsh Regiment, whose rear half-battalion was moved up to prolong the line to the right, was soon in the firing-line. For a time this single battalion was exposed to the full fury of the enemy's fire, for the Yorkshire Regiment, which received orders about 3.30 p.m. to advance against the enemy's left, had not yet begun to make its weight felt, and the Essex, who were intended to attack the Boer right, had first to clear the underfeature. The Welsh therefore lost very heavily, and as they

struggled nearer to the Boer position their progress became slower and more uncertain. In spite of the utmost efforts of men and officers, and the effective support of the field guns, the position of the battalion seemed so critical that at an early stage General Kelly-Kenny sent forward the Buffs to its support, reinforcing them soon afterwards with two companies of his last available battalion, the Gloucesters.

Advancing over the dead ground under the western snout of the Alexandra Kopje, the Buffs came up on the right of the Welsh and began to work up the ridge in the face of a heavy fire from the sangars above, part of the battalion moving on one side of the crest line, part on the other. H Company, supported by C, was on the right, or south side of the dividing rib; G and E on the left, or north. These last companies ultimately joined the right of the Welsh Regiment in the final assault, and were supported by D Company of their own battalion. Close in their right rear the two companies of the Gloucester Regiment, under Major Moss, advanced in support, while on the right of H Company of the Buffs—*i.e.*, to the south of the rib—the two remaining companies of that battalion, A and B, struggled forward up the open face, taking what cover they could find in the long grass. With them went the battalion Maxim. Thus the Buffs, advancing along the sloping crest, were moving directly against the sharp angle formed by the junction of the northern and south-western fronts of the Boer position, theoretically the weakest part of the enemy's line; the Welsh, joining on to the left of the Buffs, threatened the western end of the northern front, and the Essex, moving first of all south-east towards the underfeature (E), gradually worked to the right, or south, directly in front of the main horseshoe hollow. The bulk of the Yorkshire Regiment seems to have worked further to the right than had been intended, Captain Esson's company alone co-operating in the main attack on the right of the Buffs.[1] In rear of the Welsh and Buffs, the two field batteries, pushing

[1] The account published by the German General Staff, which does not notice the movement of Esson, criticises the advance of the Yorkshire Regiment as eccentric. The cause of its direction seems to have lain in the terms of the order which enjoined a continuation of the previous advance, a phrase which might be interpreted to imply a movement towards Boschrand. When the order arrived Captain Esson was with the three

in to a range of 1,600 yards, kept up a heavy fire of shrapnel. By 4 p.m. the attack was developing from all sides, and over a front of about three miles nearly 3,000 Infantry were converging upon the Boer position.

As must often happen in war, French had been correct in his observation and wrong in his conclusion. For some time parties of the enemy had been riding away, but many still remained, and amongst those were the well-disciplined police and the most resolute of the burghers. Struggling forward up the western rib the Buffs were met with so deadly a fire that the advance, though unchecked, made slow progress. The Maxim was soon put out of action; the companies near it suffered severely on the open slope, and even those working along the flanks of the spur lost many men. The battalion had gone into action with only nine officers; one of these was killed, three more were wounded, and only by the willingness and determination of the men and the non-commissioned officers was the forward impulse maintained. In short, spasmodic rushes, headed by single men, here by an officer, there by a sergeant or a private, over ground so broken that all order was lost and in a din that rendered voices inaudible, this fine corps steadily won its way upward. Some distance to its right Esson's company of Yorkshiremen advanced under a close fire from the sangars on the southern front. On the extreme right wing the remaining companies of the Yorkshire Regiment succeeded in establishing themselves within 800 yards of the kopjes above the Boschrand Farm. Nevertheless, in spite of the encircling advance of the British Infantry, the enemy showed no sign of yielding, and the fire-fight continued one of tremendous intensity.

While the Buffs fought their way inch by inch up the western spur, the Welsh Regiment, lying in the open plain under the full sweep of the enemy's fire, was mercilessly pounded. Since one o'clock that gallant battalion had borne the brunt of the fight, and its ammunition was beginning to run short. The extension of its front had used up its reserves, and for an hour it had gained

companies in the firing-line and out of sight of the rest of the battalion. He understood the order to mean a direct advance on the right of the Buffs, and acted in that sense.

little ground, nailed down by frontal magazine fire at 600 yards range and partially enfiladed by a pompom from the left front and by the shells of the Signal Hill guns from the left rear. On the left the Essex, after clearing the troublesome underfeature (E), had pushed forward side by side with the Welsh, and lay exposed to the same unceasing shower of bullet and shell. General Stephenson had withdrawn the companies covering the rear towards Signal Hill, and had sent them to prolong the firing line to the left, but in spite of their skilful use of the cover which offered itself in this part of the field, 300 yards of open ground still separated them from the deep recess at the eastern end of the ridge. Three-quarters of a mile behind the two field batteries had considerable difficulty in holding their own. The enemy, who ranged on a wire fence close to the guns, shelled them with great accuracy, and but for the inferiority of the ammunition would probably have put them out of action. Colonel Umpheby, of the Victorian Artillery, was killed, Lieutenants Wickham and Devenish, of the 81st, were wounded, and several men hit; more than one by rifle bullets, for the batteries were well within the reach of the Mauser. Nevertheless the gunners persevered, and to the heaviness and accuracy of their fire is largely attributable the result of the day. But at 5 p.m. its issue was still so uncertain that when the Guards Brigade arrived upon the field Lord Roberts ordered the Grenadier battalion to be ready to attack with the bayonet as soon as the moon rose.

It is one of the commonplaces of military history that when the endurance of one side seems near the breaking point the fighting energy of the other is generally in the same condition. It was just at the moment when the thin remnants of the Prussian Guard, lying prone on the glacis of St. Privat, seemed to have lost all power of advancing that the deadly Chassepot fire, which for long hours had torn their ranks to pieces, suddenly flickered out; and the infantrymen, who to all appearance had been too exhausted to move, sprang to their feet and with a yell of triumph rushed in upon the ruined village. So it was at Driefontein. A few minutes after 5 p.m., just as the last reserve companies of the Essex Regiment reached the firing-line, the rattle of the Mausers began to die away, and on the right of the Welsh arose

the cry: "The enemy are retiring, the line will advance!" The shout ran down the lines of infantry as a spark spreads along a train of powder, and in a moment the officers of that corps and of the Essex Regiment had sprung to their feet and called on their men to follow them. Then ensued a scene that will never be forgotten by those who saw it. In an instant the long lines of prostrate figures had changed into cheering, charging waves of men. As they rose the Boer musketry crashed out again, but most of the bullets went high, and though here and there a man went down,[1] the onset swept on heedless of the fire that tore the air above it. There was no need to call the men on during that last rush. Roused by the hope of victory, and infuriated by the belief that the Boers were using explosive bullets,[2] they thought of nothing but of reaching the hidden enemy who had held them at bay so long and punished them so heavily. Throughout the last few hundred yards there was no noticeable check. No one stopped to fire or to take breath, and the only fear was that, having reached the position, the men would be too exhausted for a hand-to-hand encounter if the enemy dared to stand. The Essex made straight for the crescent-shaped hollow and its western buttress, the Welsh, joining in with the two lefternmost companies of the Buffs on the right and the two reserve companies of the Essex on the left, went in one long line against the western half of the position. At the foot of the ridge bayonets were fixed, and the charge swept up the steep boulder-

[1] Lieutenant Parsons, who had been recommended for the Victoria Cross for his gallantry at Paardeberg, was killed during this stage of the advance.

[2] Such missiles are mentioned in several accounts, but we have failed to discover any solid evidence in support of these stories. That the Boers did use expanding bullets, intended for sporting purposes, is unquestioned. Many of the wounded were badly mutilated, amongst others Lieutenant Lloyd, of the Welsh Regiment, whose arm was horribly shattered. As is well known, many patterns of expanding bullets—split, flat-nosed, soft-nosed, and hollow-nosed—were found amongst the enemy's stores during the course of the campaign, but true explosive bullets, provided with bursting charges of powder, were rarely, if ever, found. We believe we are correct in saying that these miniature shells, first invented for big game shooting by Captain Forsyth and Sir Samuel Baker, have long since been discarded for the simpler and more effective expanding types. Apart from the greater expense of explosive bullets, we do not know where any Boer could have purchased them. Some of the cases of mutilation were possibly due to direct hits by pompom shells.

piled face in the teeth of a spluttering fire from the few Boers who still stood fast. Short as was the distance, it cost two gallant lives. Lieutenant Codrington, of the Essex Regiment, the first man, it is said, on the position, fell dead as he reached the summit of the buttress; Captain Lomax, adjutant of the Welsh Regiment, to whose gallant leading the success of the final charge was in no small measure due, was killed as he topped the crest of the ridge a few hundred yards from Codrington.

Few of the gallant defenders remained on the captured position. Three were bayonetted by men of the Welsh Regiment, thirty or forty were shot down as they ran to their horses, about a dozen were taken prisoners. The remainder, some hundreds strong, were already in the saddle galloping away to the eastward.

Just as the Essex and Welsh cleared the eastern portion of the hardly-contested ridge the main body of the Buffs, supported by companies of the Gloucesters and Yorkshires, won the western sangars. A few minutes before the position was rushed a number of Boers on the south side of the crest stood up and showed a white flag. Captain Dyne ordered all the men near him to cover, in case of a trick; but some of the Welsh and Buffs on the other side of the spur sprang up, and were immediately fired on, several being hit. Presumably the shots were fired by some Boers who were on the opposite side of the crest to that on which the white flag had been displayed, and consequently had not seen the token of surrender. At any rate, the conformation of the ground renders this explanation extremely probable, and until the contrary be proved there is no reason for supposing that this was a case of deliberate treachery.[1] Scarcely had this incident taken place than the whole line went forward with a rush. The Boer who had shown the white flag was bayoneted by a corporal of the Buffs, but fourteen others who were with him were taken prisoners. Pressing onwards, the Buffs halted close to the horseshoe hollow taken by the Essex, two-thirds of the battalion falling in on their markers. The

[1] This incident was observed by Lord Roberts, who at the moment seems to have been on the Driefontein Kopje. He communicated with President Steyn, who denied the charge, as well as that relating to the employment of illegal bullets, and retorted with similar accusations.

isolated company of the Yorkshire Regiment reached the ridge on the right of the Buffs and fired some long-range volleys at Boers retreating across their front. By 5.30 the last shot had been fired, and soon after 6 p.m. Colonel Benson gave orders for the disposition of the outposts. The 81st Battery, which, after the capture of the position, had moved eastwards in hopes of preventing the removal of the guns on Signal Hill, returned without accomplishing its purpose, and bivouacked with the 76th at Driefontein Pan. The Essex Regiment bivouacked on the eastern slopes of the Cattle Kraal Ridge, setting outposts in the direction of Signal Hill. The Welsh and Buffs remained on the top of the captured ridge. The Yorkshire Regiment bivouacked west of the Boschrand Farm. The remainder of the infantry, artillery, and the baggage of French's column halted close to Driefontein; the mass of the central column between that place and Katdoorn Put.

The rout of the enemy had been complete, and there were great hopes that the Cavalry would be able to take advantage of his disorganisation and cut him off from his eastern lines of retreat. Broadwood's Brigade on the central road had started at 5.45 a.m. from Poplar Grove, and about 9 a.m. was approaching the Driefontein Kopje, then held by Martyr, who, as above narrated, had marched some miles in advance of the Cavalry, and had been engaged with the enemy some time before they arrived. Firing was now audible on the left front, and the commander of the 2nd Brigade sent to French to offer assistance. His messenger brought back the answer that no assistance was necessary. At that period of the day French, as we know, was still of the opinion that he had only a rear guard in front of him. No further communication seems to have passed between the two officers until well on in the afternoon. Whether the loss of a great opportunity is directly traceable to this is uncertain, for Broadwood's own movement anticipated that which French ultimately saw himself obliged to make. But there seems no question, on the other hand, that whatever its exact tenor, French's reply led Broadwood to believe that the opposition which the left column had encountered was far less formidable than proved to be the case, and consequently to rely upon its co-operation in a greater degree than the facts warranted.

Concluding from the answer that the enemy were in very slight force, Broadwood now pushed forward to clear the ground above the Boschrand Farm, so as to secure the intended Infantry bivouac at Driefontein; but he had scarcely reached the last-named spot when a gun opened on him from the main Boer position, and he learnt from personal reconnaissance and from a report sent by Martyr that the ridge was strongly held. A short

BRIDGE OF OX-WAGGONS.

inspection convinced him that his best course was to turn the southern end of the hills and, passing round the Boer rear, place himself astride of the road to Aasvogel Kop so as to block their retreat in that direction; trusting that French would be able, by a similar movement on the northern flank, to cut the enemy off from the river and Baberspan. This assumption was reasonable enough, for Broadwood knew that the last-named spot was French's allotted halting-place, and the tone of his message seemed to suggest no doubts of his being able to reach it.

Lord Roberts approved of Broadwood's decision; and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, followed by part of Le Gallais' Mounted Infantry,[1] wheeled to the right and passed the large dry pan east of Driefontein Farm House. Sweeping well to the south by Draaibosch Pan, Broadwood cleared the point of the Boschrand Ridge and advanced south-eastwards in the direction of Sevenster's Pan. The detour was long,[2] and not unattended with difficulty, for the ground in front was broken and required careful scouting, and a Boer gun on the Boschrand Ridge shelled the flank of the column as it proceeded. It was close on 2 p.m. before the advanced squadron of the Royal Horse Guards reached Sevenster's Kopje, about three miles from the Aasvogel Kop road. The remainder of the Household Cavalry, and 10th Hussars with G and P Batteries followed; the 12th Lancers covered the left flank, and Le Gallais' Mounted Infantry took up intermediate positions between the Cavalry and Martyr's right company at the foot of the Boschrand spur.

Scarcely had the advanced squadron reached Sevenster's than it perceived a strong body of Boers with a pompom moving along the road towards Aasvogel Kop, and halted to await support. This soon arrived in the shape of Broadwood and the main body; and at the same time came a message from Major Sprot, who, it will be remembered, had been sent on with five squadrons of the 1st Brigade at the moment when the Infantry attack began, announcing that he was close at hand and ready to co-operate. Broadwood ordered him to move wide of his right or southern flank, and secure it against an attack from Aasvogel Kop, on which a number of the enemy were visible. Sprot moved off at once, and his advanced squadron came in collision with a party of Boers near the hill. A slight skirmish followed, but nothing of importance was effected, and at dark, with exhausted horses, he returned to Porter's Brigade bivouac at Draaiboschpan.

The appearance of Sprot with the greater part of Porter's Brigade must have been a great surprise to Broadwood, who was expecting

[1] Viz., the New South Wales Mounted Infantry, Kitchener's Horse, and Nesbitt's Horse. The 6th Mounted Infantry were left at Poplar Grove. The 8th Mounted Infantry were escorting the Naval Brigade, and the C.I.V. did not arrive until late in the evening.

[2] Different accounts place the distance at nine and twelve miles.

French to join hands with him from the north-east. But it was still possible that vigorous action might inflict loss on Boers retreating in the direction of Aasvogel Kop; and by 3 p.m. nearly the whole of the 2nd Brigade was massed near Sevenster's, within half an hour's ride of the road. But, for some reason that is not apparent, no further advance was attempted until after 5 p.m. The whole of the two preceding hours was spent in watching the two batteries bombard a single gun, which began shelling Sevenster's Kop from a stone kraal on a ridge above Surrey Dam. The range was about 3,000 yards, and shrapnel after shrapnel burst in front of the enclosure, spattering every stone of the wall with bullets, but the damage done to the men working the gun was quite insignificant, and although it ceased firing several times, it as often reopened from a new position. Under cover of this shelling some of Le Gallais' Mounted Infantry worked up under the ridge, and ultimately cleared it, the gun being withdrawn a few minutes before the kraal was occupied. Scarcely had it disappeared than retreating bands of Boers began to appear round the corner of the hills, and Broadwood ordered the 10th Hussars and 12th Lancers to try and cut them off, leaving the Household Cavalry and the guns to follow. But it was now too late. After pursuing two miles the exhaustion of the horses and the gathering darkness compelled the Cavalry to halt; and the troopers dismounted and led their weary beasts back to Surrey Dam under a smart sniping fire, which wounded four of the Hussars. The Brigade was not reunited till the following morning, when it formed up near the shop on the Aasvogel Kop road.

The batteries and squadrons of Porter's Brigade which had not accompanied Sprot never came in touch with Broadwood. After leaving the Driefontein Kopje they had moved round the Boschrand Ridge and at French's order had come into action on a rise to the south-east from which they shelled that part of the Boer position. At dark they retired to Draaiboschpan.

French's generalship in this important action has been hotly criticised, but although it was far from being his luckiest or most brilliant day, much of the censure seems beside the point. The main criticisms are three. In the first place it is asked, Why did he allow himself to

be diverted from his intended line of advance, and why, instead of awaiting the co-operation of the other columns did he disorganise, by wheeling to the southwards, Lord Roberts's plan of march? The answer to these questions appears to us obvious and adequate. He believed that the enemy were numerically weak and unprepared to offer a serious resistance,[1] and he knew that his Commander-in-Chief was anxious to avoid an action likely to cause delay and to involve losses disproportionate to the success achieved. Well aware that to attack frontally was to play the Boer game, he decided on a wide turning movement as the quickest way of opening the road. Again Mr. Battersby's criticism, "that he should have left the bird to the gun on his right," is only apposite on the assumption that he knew that the bird was going to the right and that the gun which was to intercept it was also aware of that fact and in a position to take advantage of it. Had French waited near Abraham's Kraal and left Lord Roberts to deal with the Boers at Driefontein the probabilities are that neither column would have got as far forward as they did, and that the evening of the 10th would have found the enemy still in his position. For with the exception of the mounted troops none of the rest of Lord Roberts's column arrived in time to take part in the fight; and the events of the day certainly do not justify the view that the Cavalry could have defeated the Boers unaided. Speed, it must be remembered, was the gist of the plan of advance, and in moving as he did French acted in the spirit of his instructions.

The last matter open to censure is the failure of the Cavalry to

[1] The German Staff account comments on the "remarkable obstinacy" with which French held to this view. Lord Roberts was guilty of a similar error. Shortly before 4 p.m. he sent a message to Kelly-Kenny urging him to force the position as he thought the enemy in front of him was quite weak. We have already noticed French's own message sent about two hours earlier. These mistakes in observation were no doubt rendered more likely by the false impression of the situation which was reflected in the march-table of the preceding evening. It should be noted, however, that both General French and the Commander-in-Chief were looking at the back of the Boer position rather than that face of it on which Kelly-Kenny was engaged, and direction of wind and absence of smoke may have contributed to give a wrong idea of what was really happening. A curious instance of the difficulty of observation occurred in the course of the day near Abraham's Kraal, when a large herd of galloping blesbok were taken for Boers. The mistake was not discovered until preparations were in progress to meet an attack.

inflict a blow upon the broken enemy. Here it is possible that the critics complain with better reason. The first point to be noticed is the loss of touch between French and Broadwood, which, on the side of the latter at any rate, led to a misconception of his superior officer's situation and caused him to expect co-operation in a direction from which none was forthcoming. Whether Broadwood learnt the actual positions of French's troops from Sprot we cannot say; certainly he should have done so. But his immobility during the last hours of the afternoon seems to suggest that even after the arrival of Sprot he was expecting French to appear at the north-eastern corner of the battlefield. Whether French, disregarding the fire from Signal Hill and from the bodies of Boers hovering between that place and Abraham's Kraal, could have passed with Porter's Cavalry round the north of the Boer position during the progress of the Infantry attack is a different matter. No attempt of the kind seems to have been made, and it is exceedingly unlikely that it would have succeeded. That the idea does not seem to have occurred to French or Porter shows that such a movement was considerably more risky than it appears on the map.

But supposing that this alternative was not practicable, and that the Cavalry was considerably hampered by Broadwood's ignorance of the general situation, might not more have been done by his own brigade and the squadrons brought by Sprot? Could not Broadwood have effectually blocked the road before the Boer retreat became general? Might he not have disregarded the spasmodic fire of the enemy's gun? It is difficult to answer these questions in the negative. At the same time we must not forget the state of his horses. The two days' rest at Poplar Grove had done practically nothing for animals so overworked and so ill-fed; and the march to Sevenster's, a distance of something between twenty-five and thirty miles, had completely exhausted them. We have already referred to the effect that the knowledge of this fact must have had on officers trained to consider the speed and endurance of their horses as the principal strength of their arm; and it seems probable that here the same sense of impotence as that which operated on March 7th was accountable for the lack of vigour shown by the British horsemen.

It was exceedingly fortunate, at the moment when it became obvious that the original plan of co-operation was unlikely to succeed, that the leader of the 6th Division proved himself capable of taking an independent decision, and in face of heavy loss and in contradiction to the spirit of the orders issued by Lord Roberts, of carrying to its conclusion an attack which was remarkable alike in its execution and its results. In the general management of the fight, in the close co-operation of the infantry and artillery, in the judicious employment of the reserves, in the gradual attainment of the "fire superiority," and the irresistible rush that followed it, the German General Staff history finds an excellent example of the way in which an attack under modern conditions should be conducted. In two essential respects it draws a sharp distinction between Driefontein and the initial combats of the war. In the first place it notes that the beginning of the artillery preparation and the commencement of the infantry attack took place simultaneously; that while the former was maintained until the last possible moment, until, that is, its own infantry was on the point of entering the hostile position, the infantry, instead of waiting until the batteries might have been supposed to have silenced the enemy's fire, deployed and advanced as soon as the guns opened. "The artillery and infantry combat are no longer, as in many previous fights, two separate acts." In the second place it sees in the long and wearing fire-fight maintained by the infantry in front of the Boer position a radical departure from the attempts at isolated shock-action which had formed the principal feature of earlier actions. Driefontein "is, in fact, apart from that of Elandslaagte, undoubtedly the first fight of the campaign in which, on the English side, fire-effect is adequately recognised as the only decisive factor in present day fighting, and the struggle for fire-superiority is deliberately and insistently and stoutly carried through."

Whether these important considerations had at the time taken such definite form in the minds of the British leaders as seems here to be assumed, may perhaps be doubted. The fact that contemporary criticism, which is after all merely a concentrated form of preconceived ideas, dwelt more upon the unavoidable haste and hurry in the preparations for action than upon their intentional and concerted character, points

to a different conclusion. Driefontein, says Mr. Battersby, was one of the large class of actions which fight themselves; and it may reasonably be assumed that special circumstances had more influence upon the development of the struggle than any preconceived theory of attack.[1] Nevertheless the tactical factors of the victory, however originated, were no doubt those to which the German account refers so appreciatively, and impresses so strongly upon the army for whose use it is written. It is to their presence and to the cool and resolute leading of Generals Kelly-Kenny and Stephenson that Driefontein owes the title of "the most instructive combat of the whole campaign."

So much for the management of the action. The conduct of the troops most seriously engaged is entitled to the highest praise. Weeks afterwards, referring to the endurance and elasticity of the British Infantry, a German officer is reported to have said that they overthrew all modern theories of offensive tactics; for that whereas it was an accepted dogma on the Continent that the troops who had borne the brunt of the fire-fight could not be expected to carry out the final charge, in South Africa the same battalions were to the front throughout. It was a graceful compliment, and whether the comparison on which it was based was strictly fair or not, it was well earned by the men who fought at Driefontein. It would be invidious, as well as useless, to try to apportion too nicely the comparative merits of the three battalions principally concerned.[2] If, as is generally conceded,

[1] For instance, in Lord Roberts's Memorandum of January 26, 1900, entitled "Notes for Guidance in South African Warfare," there was no reference to the necessity of depth of formation in the German sense of successive reinforcements. Direct attack was described as certain to fail, and great stress was laid upon the importance of outflanking movements. The extract from General Kelly-Kenny's own instructions translated on p. 112 of the German account, follows in its general lines those of Lord Roberts. It is to be noticed, however, that in his remarks on the employment of the artillery the latter recognised the futility of so-called preparation before the advance of the infantry had obliged the defenders to occupy their trenches, and insisted on the necessity of continuous and heavy fire up to the last possible moment.

[2] Various stories of one battalion passing through another were current after the fight. These rumours, so far as we have been able to discover, are in the main without foundation. Supporting companies no doubt passed through scattered stragglers on their way to the firing line, but the bulk of every battalion was well to the front when the troops entered the position. Such statements as that the Yorkshires passed through the Buffs, or the

the advance of the Essex Regiment against the eastern end of the Boer position was one of the principal causes of the sudden collapse of the defence, at least an equal amount of credit is due to the long-suffering hardihood of the Welsh, the courage and discipline of the Buffs and the gallant response of all ranks to the final appeal of their officers. Not less worthy of admiration was the stubborn defence of the Zarps. Swept for hours by an unceasing storm of shell and bullets, and numerically overmatched,[1] they fought with a desperation that almost turned the scales of victory. As a result they suffered more heavily than any Boer force during the war.[2] In addition to 102 dead buried on the following day, nearly fifty more were discovered later, and large numbers of wounded were carried back to Bloemfontein. The price paid for the victory, though heavy, was not excessive. The blow destroyed the last lingering hopes of a successful defence of the Free State Capital.[3]

Essex and Buffs passed through the Welsh, rest on hearsay or on the impressions of eye-witnesses, formed from fleeting glimpses over limited areas at moments of extreme tension and confusion; and even if they were true would be extremely hard to substantiate.

[1] The General Staff account estimates the number of the Boers on the main position at 2,000. The attacking force numbered about 3,000.

[2] The losses of the stormers of Waggon Hill and Cæsar's Camp form a possible exception. Boer accounts have suggested exhaustion of ammunition supply as the cause of the collapse of the defence, but the large quantities of cartridges found in the sangars render this view untenable.

[3] TABLE OF CASUALTIES.

	Officers.			Rank and File.		
Infantry.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.
1st Welsh Regiment ...	2	5	...	17	109	5
1st Essex „ ...	2	4	...	11	79	16
2nd East Kent Regiment ...	1	3	...	17	79	5
1st Yorkshire „ ...	...	...	...	1	27	...
2nd Gloucestershire „ ...	...	1	...	4	19	...
Royal Artillery	1	2	...	2	5	...
Royal Engineers	...	...	...	...	3	...
Cavalry Alderson	1	1	...	2	17	2
	7	16	...	54	338	28

All ranks, 443.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CAPTURE OF BLOEMFONTEIN

RETREAT OF THE BOERS AFTER DRIEFONTEIN—BRITISH MOVEMENTS ON MARCH 11TH AND MARCH 12TH—ROBERTS PUSHES THE CAVALRY ON TO BRAND KOP—BRAND KOP FOUND OCCUPIED—RAILWAY AT LEEUWBERG BROKEN—SCOBELL ORDERED TO SEIZE A HILL EAST OF THE RAILWAY—FLIGHT OF THE ENEMY—POSITIONS AT NIGHTFALL—HUNTER-WESTON BREAKS THE RAILWAY NORTH OF BLOEMFONTEIN—MORNING OF THE 13TH—RETREAT OF THE ENEMY—ENTRY OF LORD ROBERTS INTO BLOEMFONTEIN—POSSIBILITIES OF AN IMMEDIATE PURSUIT—STATE OF THE ARMY—INFANTRY—MOUNTED TROOPS—WANT OF SUPPLIES—WORK ON THE RAILWAY BETWEEN MARCH AND MAY—ADVANTAGES OF THE HALT TO THE ENEMY—COMPARISON OF THE ADVANTAGES OF THE ROUTES FROM MODDER AND NORVAL'S PONT—DIFFICULTIES OF THIS—DECISIVE SUCCESS BEST SECURED BY MODDER ROUTE—QUESTION OF SUPPLY—ELEMENT OF SPEED—RAILWAY SUPPLY ON THE TWO ROUTES COMPARED—EARLIER RESTORATION OF RAILWAY IN CASE OF AN ADVANCE FROM NORVAL'S PONT—PRESUMABLE ADVANTAGES OF THIS—CONCLUSIONS—SPECIFIC CAUSES OF THE DEMOBILISATION OF THE ARMY ENTERIC—BREAKDOWN OF THE HORSES—ITS CAUSES—LORD ROBERTS'S TACTICS—SIZE OF HIS FORCE—DIFFICULTIES OF SOUTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGNING—VIGOUR OF LORD ROBERTS'S GENERALSHIP—THE GUERILLA SYSTEM.

THROUGHOUT the night that followed the action of Driefontein and the greater portion of the next day the enemy retreated in great haste and confusion. Sturdily as they had fought, the inevitable reaction brought on by exhaustion and defeat told fatally upon their undisciplined ranks. "With the setting of the sun," says De Wet, "a change came over them." Unsupported by fresh commandos and uncontrolled by the ties of an organised discipline they yielded to feelings of panic as overwhelming as those which had accompanied the rout from Poplar Grove, and hastened to Bloemfontein without attempting to rally. By the afternoon of the 11th the bulk of the beaten troops were in the neighbourhood of the town[1]

[1] Thus De Villebois Mareuil and his band of Frenchmen, who during the action of Driefontein seem to have remained near Abraham's Kraal, received orders to retreat at 9 p.m. Riding throughout the night they reached Bloemfontein during the afternoon of the following day. The rapidity of the Boer movements sufficiently demonstrates the impossibility of inflicting loss upon retreating commandos except in cases where great laagers or other impediments at once decreased the enemy's mobility and offered a tangible objective to the pursuers.

where some preparations for resistance had already been put in hand. With the exception of a few scouts under Danie Theron not a Boer remained to oppose the advance of the British Army.

Lord Roberts, as we know, had every reason for avoiding delay, and from this moment he pushed on his troops with all possible speed. In spite of the disarrangement of his dispositions resulting from the unexpected resistance of the enemy on March 10th and the massing of the left and centre columns on a single road, the bulk of the army advanced distances of between nine and thirteen miles on the day following the battle, and on the evening of the 11th were placed as follows :—

The 1st Cavalry Brigade, starting at 5.45 a.m., marched to Dornboom, seeing no enemy but a few scouting parties, which fell back on its approach. Its brigade-division of horse-artillery replenished its ammunition waggons *en route*, and reached the halting-place late in the afternoon. Thither also came the 9th Division and the naval guns, the latter having marched thirty-four miles in twenty-six hours. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade, after concentrating at Surrey Farm, made a short march of nine miles to Aasvogel Kop, three miles in rear of Dornboom, and spent the rest of the day in endeavouring to supplement their scanty supply of forage by cutting mealies and grazing their horses. To the same point, after a fourteen-mile march, came the 6th Division, the Guards Brigade, the supply and ammunition parks and the howitzers. Alderson's Mounted Infantry accompanied Porter to Dornboom, Martyr's and Le Gallais' brigades reached Aasvogel Kop. General Tucker, who in accordance with Lord Roberts's orders of the 9th, had reached Petrusberg with the right column on the preceding day, marched to Driekop, where he halted to allow the 4th and 6th Mounted Infantry and the Hampshire Regiment[1] to bring up a convoy. On the night of the 11th these units halted at Boskop, half way between Poplar Grove and Petrusberg. The Warwickshire Regiment[2] and the 15th Brigade were still some distance in rear,

[1] These troops had been engaged in keeping open the line of communication with Kimberley.

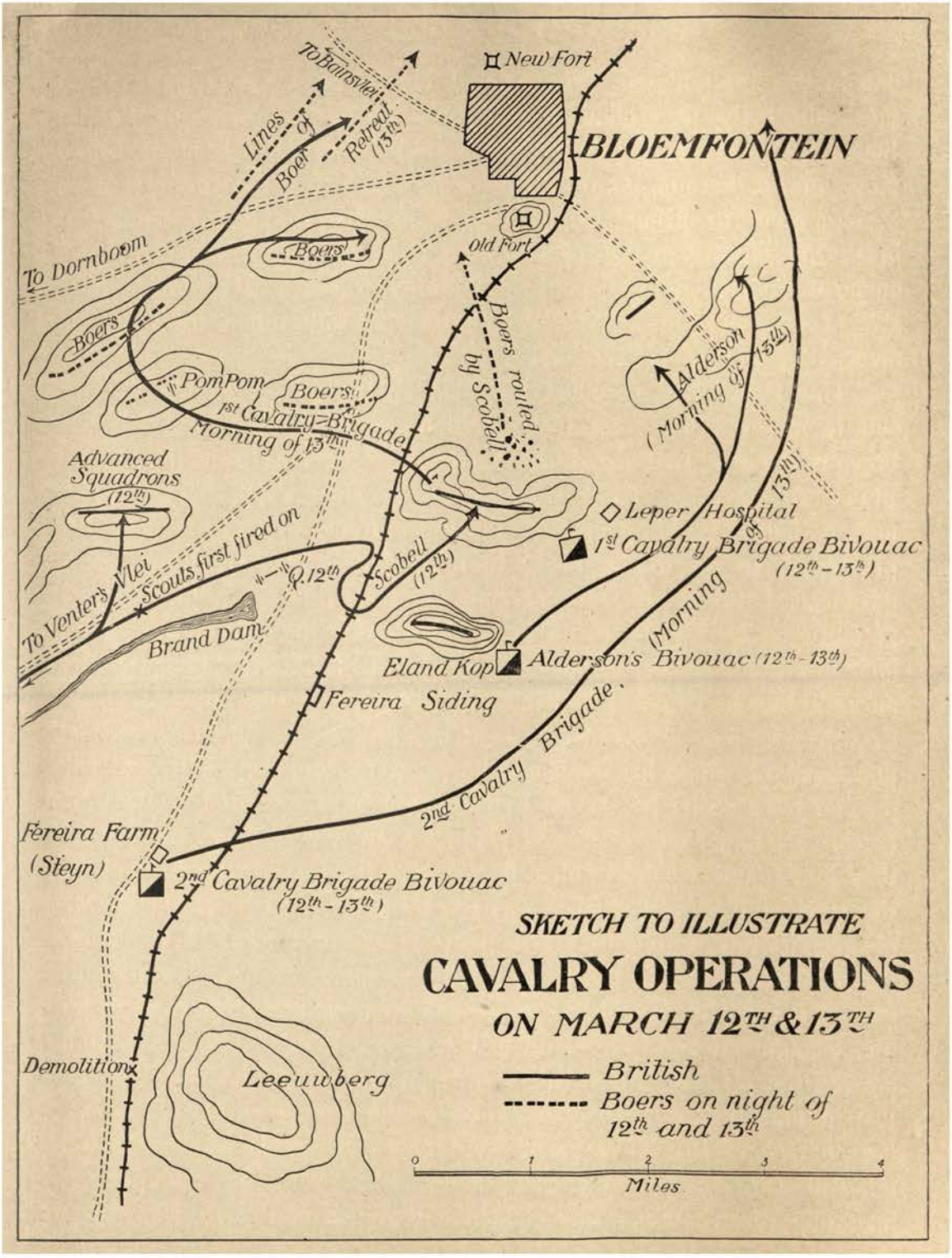
[2] Belonging to Stephenson's Brigade of the 6th Division.

marching from Poplar Grove. On the same evening Lord Roberts issued a Proclamation to the inhabitants of Bloemfontein, promising them good treatment so long as they forbore to oppose his entry.

On the morning of March 12th, the 6th and 9th Divisions with Le Gallais' Mounted Infantry, the heavy artillery and the supply parks advanced south-east to Venter's Vlei, whither they had been preceded by the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Brigades, Alderson and Martyr. Particular stress had been laid on the necessity of scouting to the left front, for the enemy were known to be occupying positions at Bainsvlei, a few miles west of Bloemfontein, and in marching to Venter's Vlei the army in some degree exposed its flank. However, no opposition was encountered, and the mounted troops reached the halting-place about 10.30 a.m.

The Field Marshal had ridden on in front of the infantry, and in the course of the morning joined French at Venter's Vlei. The turning movement up the left bank of the Kaal Spruit had placed him on the flank of any Boer force which might be covering the western approaches to Bloemfontein and practically ensured his reaching the railway. But information, which was afterwards confirmed by the capture of a telegram from Kruger to Joubert, now arrived announcing the advance of Boer reinforcements from the north; and it was evident that if serious opposition was to be forestalled and, what was quite as important, the rolling stock in Bloemfontein seized, haste was essential. Therefore, after a conference with his cavalry commander he determined to call upon his troops for a fresh effort and directed French to move, not upon the original march-point Leeuwberg, some thirteen miles south of the town, but upon Brand Kop, a hill six miles nearer, which formed part of the semi-circles of kopjes that overlook Bloemfontein from the south, east, and west. The seizure of these points would deprive the enemy of their best positions on that side, and render further resistance on the part of the town unlikely and a prolonged defence impossible.

At 1 p.m. Porter and Alderson left Venter's Vlei and curving gradually round to the north-east drew near the chain of kopjes which hid the Free State capital from their view. Two squadrons thrown


New Fort
BLOEMFONTEIN
To Bainsvlei
Lines of Boer Retreat (13th)
Old Fort
To Dornboom
Boers
Boers
Pom Pom
Boers
1st Cavalry Brigade Morning of 13th
Boers routed by Scobell
Alderson (Morning of 13th)
Advanced Squadrons (12th)
Leper Hospital
1st Cavalry Brigade Bivouac (12th - 13th)
To Venters Vlei
Scouts first fired on
Q.12th
Scobell (12th)
Brand Dam
Eland Kop
Alderson's Bivouac (12th - 13th)
Fereira Siding
2nd Cavalry Brigade (Morning of 13th)
Fereira Farm (Steyn)
2nd Cavalry Brigade Bivouac (12th - 13th)
Demolition
Leeuwberg
SKETCH TO ILLUSTRATE
CAVALRY OPERATIONS
ON MARCH 12TH & 13TH
British
Boers on night of 12th and 13th
0 1 2 3 4
Miles

out on the left and left front covered the advance. At 4 p.m., when the main body was about a mile and a half south-west of Fereira Siding, the enemy was reported entrenched near the base of Brand Kop, and it became known that trains[1] had that day been sent to Springfontein to bring up burghers from Norval's Pont. Orders to break the railway at Leeuwberg were at once despatched; while the mounted troops, leaving behind the batteries, whose horses were scarcely able to trot, hurried north-eastwards to deal with the enemy between themselves and Bloemfontein.

The Boers had occupied the hills on both sides of the railway, and it was the fire from their positions west of the line which had brought the advanced squadrons to a halt. Reinforced by a third under Major Allenby, the latter occupied a detached kopje about a mile and a half to the south of the hills from which the fire had proceeded, so as to be ready to protect French's left front as he advanced between the railway and Fereira Spruit. With his usual promptitude he had made up his mind to cross the line and capture a long low ridge some four miles to the north of Fereira Siding, cut the enemy's line in two and outflank the hills west of the railway. Major Scobell with his squadron of Greys was ordered to push on with all the speed of which his weakened horses were capable, and try to gain the hill by a dash; he was to be supported by a squadron of Roberts's horse. Passing south of Brand Dam, he cut a wire fence under a fire that killed and wounded nine horses, and tried to cross the line; but the wire of the railway fence was too thick for his cutters and he was obliged to return to Porter and pass at a point further to the south. Again turning to the north he gave the order to draw swords, and galloping on without pausing to reconnoitre, reached the base of the hill, dismounted and hurried up to the crest. Finding it unoccupied he crossed the plateau with twenty-eight men and gained its northern edge just in time to fire a volley into 200 of the enemy who were advancing to occupy it. These men were only 300 yards away and were mingled with several hundred others who were on the point of mounting their horses. The sudden appearance of the British was too

[1] Two days later these trains were captured by Captain Hennessy. See Chapter XVI.

much for the shaken nerves of the burghers and without an attempt to retake the hill or to discover the strength of their opponents they fled precipitately, eight falling under the carbine fire which followed their retreat. Orders reached Scobell to hold on at all costs, and during the night he was reinforced by forty or fifty of Rimington's Guides from Alderson's Brigade. No hostile attempt however was made upon the position, and the two brigades bivouacked undisturbed; Alderson near Eland Kop, south of the hill occupied by Scobell, Porter not far from the Bloemfontein Leper Hospital. The vigorous action of the Scots Greys had broken the hostile centre, and had put an end to De Wet's last hopes of defending the capital.

West of the line the Boers still remained in presence; and at 5.30 p.m. orders had reached Lieutenant-Colonel Rochfort to send forward a battery. As the night closed in Major Phipps-Hornby, after an up-hill trot during which seven horses dropped dead in the traces, came into action near Brand Dam against a hill 3,000 yards to the north-west, from which a pompom was firing. The brief artillery duel which followed was accompanied by a heavy thunder-storm, and to the men of Broadwood's Brigade, who had left Venter's Vlei at 2.30 p.m. and were now drawing near the scene of the fighting, the flashes of shells and lightning along the crests of the kopjes, and the mingled reverberation of the guns and the thunder, seemed like one fierce continuous cannonade. The gun-fire soon ceased; but the rumble of thunder and the rattle of musketry kept up the commotion far into the night.

French himself remained at Steyn's Farm, where at 9 p.m. he was joined by Broadwood. Some time before midnight Major Hunter-Weston, with an officer, ten men of the Royal Engineers, and a guide, left the divisional headquarters with the intention of breaking the railway north of Bloemfontein, and so preventing the enemy from withdrawing their rolling-stock. The party rode round the east of the town until it reached Bloemspruit Farm, and then, turning westward, struck the railway about 4 a.m. Half an hour later they had blown up a culvert, cut the telegraph line, and were on their way back. So far they had met with no opposition; but in the faint

light of early dawn they came within thirty yards of a Boer outpost on the other side of a deep water-course, and only the presence of mind of their leader, who rode straight at the enemy, prevented their capture. Startled by the sudden apparition of the horsemen, the burghers fled without firing a shot; and Hunter-Weston found his way back to the British lines unopposed and unpursued. Seven locomotives, twenty carriages, and one hundred and forty trucks, afterwards found in Bloemfontein Station, were the result of this daring ride.

Meanwhile General French's midnight message, reporting the capture of the hills, had reached Lord Roberts, and at 5 a.m., accompanied by the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, which he had summoned from Driekop in the course of the preceding day, he started for Brand Kop. About the same hour Porter and French, with two horse batteries, rode to the hill captured from the enemy, and had the satisfaction of discovering that they were within 4,000 yards of the town. A few Boers were still in position on the hills west of the line, but retired after firing a few random shells. Soon after dawn Broadwood and Alderson commenced a turning movement on the eastern side of Bloemfontein, while the 1st Cavalry Brigade extended towards the west. Pushing back the lingering parties of the enemy without difficulty, the mounted troops soon occupied positions within easy artillery range of the Old Fort; and the horse batteries moved forward in the track of the advanced squadrons ready to open fire. But the work had been stripped of its armament, and the enemy had abandoned all thought of defending the town. By 9.30 a.m. all firing had ceased. The 1st Cavalry Brigade took up a line of outposts extending from the railway north-west to the Bainsvlei road, Alderson and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade encircled the town on the south and east. The 3rd Brigade, which was now approaching, moved up in support.

Meanwhile General French remained on the Greys' Hill. As yet no answer had been received to the summons, which he had sent in on the preceding afternoon,[1] but soon after 11 a.m., about

[1] By the hand of a member of the Free State Executive whom he had captured during his advance to Fereira Siding.

which time Lord Roberts himself reached the Greys' Hill, a few of the town officials, including Mr. Fraser, the brother-in-law of the President, the Mayor, and the Landrost, drove out and delivered up the keys. At 1.20 p.m. Lord Roberts rode into the town, escorted by the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. No signs of anti-British feeling were visible, and the only disorder that occurred arose from the dispersion of some natives who were looting the barracks. The Headquarter Staff established itself in the Government buildings. To Major-General Pretyman were allotted the duties of Military Governor.[1]

The bulk of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade advanced and occupied the kopjes north of the town in the neighbourhood of Rustfontein. The 2nd established itself at Bloemspruit, on the right of the 3rd. No attempt was made to pursue the enemy. The exhausted condition of the horses would probably have rendered any such attempt impossible, even if any considerable body of the Boers had remained within striking distance. This does not seem to have been the case. De Wet lays the principal blame for the weakness of the burghers' resistance on Commandant Weilbach, whose spiritless retreat before Scobell, had allowed "the key to Bloemfontein" to fall into British hands. But it is abundantly clear that the *morale* of the whole army had for the moment been fatally shaken; and it is probable that the retirement upon Brandfort began long before the arrival of the Cavalry on the hills south of the town. According to one of the followers of De Villebois Mareuil, who bivouacked on the evening of the 12th–13th near the Glen, fifteen miles beyond Bloemfontein, laagers were passing northward throughout the night, and no attempt to rally was made till the main body reached Kroonstadt, more than one hundred miles distant. President Steyn himself left Bloemfontein early

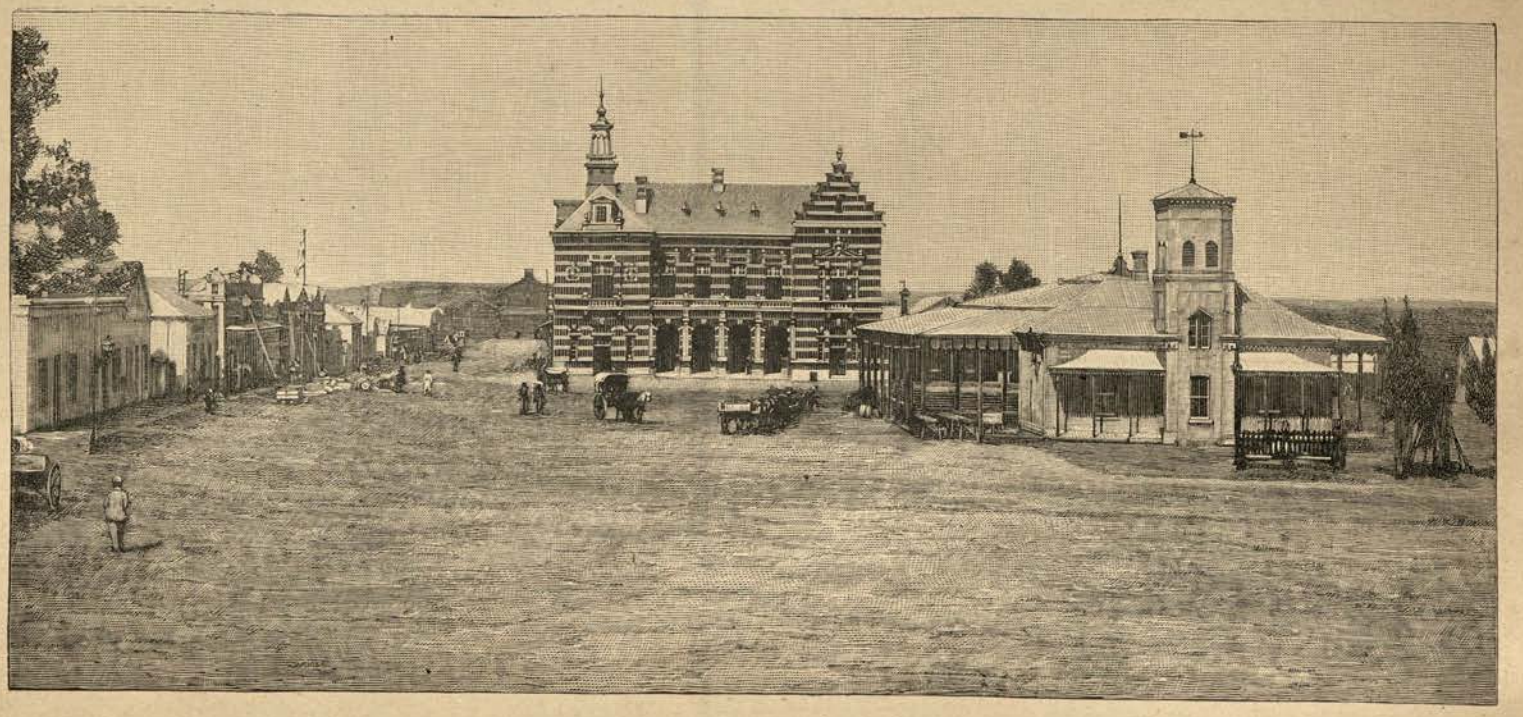
[1] The further movements of the infantry were as follows: The first to reach the town were the Guards Brigade, who made a fine march from Venter's Vlei (twenty-two miles), and reached Bloemfontein at 6 p.m. on the same evening. The 6th Division, after a weary march, which was greatly delayed by the exhaustion of their transport, bivouacked at Brand Kop at 1 a.m. on the 14th. The 9th Division, with the baggage and heavy artillery, marched to Fereira Spruit. Tucker's column concentrated at Driekop and Panfontein. On the 14th the 6th Division entered Bloemfontein, whither it was followed on the next day by the 9th. Both encamped outside the town. Tucker reached Quaggafontein, eight miles west of Bloemfontein, on the 16th.

on the evening before the surrender. It is tolerably certain that by the morning of the 13th the main body of the enemy, with the baggage, was already a day's march distant, and that unless something more than a brief tactical pursuit had been contemplated, nothing would have been gained by sending the Cavalry forward on that day.

The results of a general and immediate advance northward would no doubt have been very different. It is thought by many that if the Boers had been vigorously pressed they would have abandoned the struggle. To speak dogmatically on such a point is, of course, impossible: and the later conduct of the enemy may well be adduced in support of a different conclusion. Nevertheless, if the view that a vigorous offensive after the fall of Pretoria or the advance to Koomati Poort would have compelled the enemy to make peace is correct—and on both those occasions the same phenomenon, the loss of the after-fruits of a great effort through the exhaustion that the effort itself entailed, is apparent—it seems equally arguable that a rapid advance after the capture of Bloemfontein would at least have put an end to the fighting in the Free State. For the first time, and therefore before custom had inured the Boers to the alarms of war, they had felt the effects of defeat and invasion, and for the moment they shrank back appalled before the threatening spectres of national disaster and individual ruin. Most of the men composing the commandos of Smithfield, Wepener, Bloemfontein, and Philippolis had already separated from the main body, and had hastened home to make their peace with the conquerors. Many of the more northern Free Staters were similarly dispersing. As De Wet admits, the ten days' leave of absence which he granted about this time was not a matter of choice, but of compulsion. "Whatever I had said or done, the burghers would have gone home."[1] If by a wave of his wand some magician could have repaired the Orange River bridges, restored the Army to the condition in which it left the Modder and launched it upon Kroonstadt, the state of affairs in the country south of the Vaal might have resembled that of the districts comprised in General Buller's proposed quadrilateral.[2] So undisturbed did the course

[1] "Three Years' War," p. 78.

[2] See Chapter XI.



MARKET PLACE, BLOEMFONTEIN.

of the campaign after the fall of the Free State capital leave the country between the Kimberley and Bloemfontein railways that when, nearly a year later, the fever of irregular warfare again aroused its inhabitants, they spoke of the new operations as "the second war."

But an immediate continuation of the advance was impossible. The army, so far as offensive projects were concerned, was for the moment formidable in numbers alone. It is true that the losses during the operations of the preceding month had been comparatively slight, amounting, if the state of January 31st be taken as a basis for calculation, to about 10 per cent. The casualties sustained in action numbered some 2,200, and there were probably about 1,500 men and officers placed *hors de combat* by sickness.[1] By March 15th over 34,000 men with 115 guns and 12,000 horses were concentrated round Bloemfontein. But in all the arms the diminution of effective strength had far exceeded the numerical loss. The infantry were badly exhausted. Proud as was the bearing of the 6th Division when it entered Bloemfontein, as befitted the troops who had borne the brunt of the fighting, its appearance amply witnessed to the hardships it had undergone. The faces of the men were marked with the signs of fatigue and incipient disease; their clothing was in rags; their boots were worn out. During the preceding month the division had lost over 22 per cent. of its total strength. Its complement of officers was dangerously reduced. None of its battalions had at the

[1] The 6th Division had 400 sick, the 9th Division 596. The units that are included in the States of January 31st and March 15th numbered on the former date 35,571 men and officers exclusive of the personnel of the ammunition columns, Army Service Corps, bearer companies and field hospitals. On the latter date they had a strength of 29,207, giving a diminution of 6,362. Deducting 3,700 for losses by wounds or disease, we have still to account for a difference of over 2,500. This is principally referable to the fact that the totals of the cavalry regiments, newly formed mounted infantry regiments and personnel of the artillery as given in the estimate of January 31st are in part nominal and in part include a number of details scattered in depôts or otherwise unavailable for service in the field. These headings probably account for some 2,000 men. The remaining 500 must have consisted of detachments on the line of advance or details left at Modder River. Adding to the 29,207 the 2,000 and odd additional troops who joined the army during the operations we get a strength of over 31,000 men and officers, or, including ammunition columns, army service corps, and medical establishment, a grand total of over 34,000 men and 12,000 horses concentrated round Bloemfontein by the middle of March.

beginning of the campaign possessed more than twenty-three; the 2nd Buffs had actually taken the field with eighteen. At the moment of reaching Bloemfontein that battalion and the 1st Welsh possessed ten apiece, the 1st Essex Regiment eleven, the 1st Yorkshire twelve. The 9th Division was scarcely better off. The 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, the 2nd Black Watch, and 1st Argyll and Sutherland had twelve, thirteen and fourteen officers respectively; the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry had fifteen. The 7th Division and the Guards Brigade had seen comparatively little fighting, but like the 6th and 9th Divisions they were greatly in need of rest and fresh equipment.

Nevertheless the condition of the infantry was not such as to render the greater part of them absolutely incapable of continuing the advance after a few days' rest. The state of the mounted arms and horse artillery was more serious. Since leaving the Modder the Cavalry Division had lost or left behind nearly 2,000 horses. The remainder were quite incapable of doing their proper work. The Horse Artillery, though their material had stood the rough work excellently, were in the same condition. The Mounted Infantry, though less hardly worked than the Cavalry, had been grievously handicapped by want of equipment, by unsuitable horses, and by the lack of horsemanship and horsemastership amongst the rank and file. The Colonial mounted troops, especially some of the Australians,[1] had suffered much in the same degree and in the same way. Until the mounted arms could again be rendered mobile the edge of Lord Roberts's sword was fatally blunted.

But whatever had been the condition of the troops a halt would have been rendered unavoidable by the lack of supplies. The Army reached Bloemfontein with ten days' groceries, five days' bread stuffs, and one day's forage in hand. Its only source of adequate supply lay behind the broken railway bridges, for no sufficient reserve could be accumulated locally. For some days it lived almost from hand to mouth. When on March 20th Colonel Ward reached Bloemfontein and took over the

[1] The idea that the Colonial is as good a horsemaster as he is a horseman was completely exploded in South Africa. Living in countries where horses are plentiful he is more inclined to waste than to economy.

duties of Director of Supplies he found that the reserve was still under ten days' requirements in food, and only five days' in forage. Although the advance of Generals Clements and Gatacre had made it possible to accumulate enormous quantities of supplies on the southern bank of the Orange River, the regular train service through Norval's Pont could not be re-established until March 29th. During the sixteen preceding days, according to Lord Roberts, not a single truck could be brought across, and all stores which were passed over the temporary swing-bridge [1] had to be carried to Bloemfontein by waggons. This swing-bridge [2] had a carrying capacity of only 100 tons a day, or about a quarter of one day's supply for the army at Bloemfontein. Thus, supposing it to have been available throughout, only 1,600 tons, or four days' supply, could at the outside have reached the Free State capital from Norval's Pont before March 29th. Even after the low deviation bridge had been established, it was for some time impossible, owing to the lack of engines and the extreme congestion of rolling stock south of the river, to send up as much as one day's supply to Bloemfontein every twenty-four hours. During the first ten days (March 29th–April 7th) only 276 supply trucks came in, carrying about seven days' requirements; [3] by April 17th the daily deficit had scarcely been made up. Throughout the whole of this period other pressing wants had had to be met, amounting in all to over 1,800 truck-loads. [4] Up to April 17th altogether some 2,600 trucks had arrived, and of these it had only been possible to devote two-sevenths to the carriage of food and forage. Not until the 3rd of May, or fifty days after the occupation of Bloemfontein, was it possible

[1] Hospital Commission, Question 12696. Lord Roberts does not state in what way the rolling stock captured at Bloemfontein was used during these days. Apparently it was not available for carrying stores.

[2] This consisted of wire-hawsers stretched from bank to bank, along which a trolley was passed. It will be remembered that the only other means of passing over supplies, the pontoon bridge below Norval's Pont, was for four days used for the supply of Clement's column.

[3] The army required forty trucks for one day's supply.

[4] Of hospital necessaries 62 trucks were brought up; of ordnance stores, mainly consisting of tents for the sick, 461; of troops to replace the sick and wounded, 389; of horses and mules, 409; of baggage left behind at Modder River, 205; of waggons and ambulances, 53; of ammunition, 76; of coal, 133; of general traffic and railway stores, 36.

to collect a 30 days' reserve,[1] a quantity sufficient to justify a further advance.[2]

It would be out of place in this history, which does not contemplate a narrative of the march on Pretoria, to dwell in detail on the effects of this halt upon after events. So far as the future history of the campaign is concerned, it is enough to say that the condition of the British Army deprived it of many of the advantages which its efforts had placed within its view, that it alone prevented the destruction or capture of Olivier's 5,000 men retreating pell-mell along the Basutoland frontier; that it gave the enemy time to recover in some degree their lost *morale*, to reorganise their system,[3] and by a renewed offensive into the southern-eastern districts of the Free State to diminish our prestige, even if they could not seriously endanger the stability of our position.

But for us the demobilisation of the army has a retrospective importance, inasmuch as it had been made the basis of a general criticism on the conception and execution of the plan of campaign,

[1] Hospital Commission (12260), Colonel Ward. Lord Roberts (12696) estimates the amount at forty-five days.

[2] A note on the work of the railway may perhaps be of interest. Over a single line of some 120 miles in length, 9,298 loaded trucks were moved varying distances and to different destinations in thirty-six days, an average of 258 trucks per diem. The average number of trucks per train was twenty-seven. The engines available were at first eleven, at the end fifteen. The greatest number of trains run in one day was thirteen, the lowest two. The trucks, with the exception of the 108 captured at Bloemfontein, were entirely supplied by the Cape Government Railways. Of the 9,298 truck-loads 6,618 were sent from Norval's Pont and Bethulie to Bloemfontein. The remaining 2,680 were despatched to other stations. Of these last about half were employed in the transport of troops to points threatened by the enemy, notably that of the 8th Division to Edenberg, and of a force from Bloemfontein to repair the disaster of Reddersberg between April 6th and 8th. The other half consisted of hospital trains and over 1,200 trucks which carried waggons, live stock and coal to Springfontein. Of the main item, *i.e.*, the through traffic from Norval's Pont to Bloemfontein, one half (3,308) were supply-trucks. The remainder were divided as follows: 781 ordnance, 800 horses, 530 troops, 112 hospital and medical, 90 live stock, 309 baggage, 45 railway and telegraph material, 89 ammunition, 125 waggons, 132 various, 210 coal, 87 general traffic. (See the evidence of Colonel Girouard, and the summary on p. 320 of the Appendix Volume of the Report of the Commission on the Care and Treatment of the Sick and Wounded.)

[3] At the conference at Kroonstadt, March 17, it was agreed to abolish the cumbrous laagers, which had been one of the main causes of Cronje's ruin, and only to employ horse commandos.

and has been cited as a proof of the superiority of the original scheme of advance through Norval's Pont by no less an authority than Lord Wolseley himself.

Before proceeding to consider the justice of this view, we must insist once more upon the magnitude of the actual achievement. It cannot be reasonably maintained that the results of the march to Bloemfontein were disappointing. The effect of Cronje's defeat is hardly to be exaggerated. By the time the capital was reached the situation had totally and irrevocably changed; and our superiority in the field had been definitely established.[1] This was a great result; how great was proved by the thankfulness with which it was accepted at the time. Nor is it easy to prove that it would have been achieved at a lower cost on another route; the less so because many of the arguments in favour of such a view are necessarily based on assumptions. When it is maintained that an army advancing by Norval's Pont would, on reaching Bloemfontein, have been able almost immediately to continue the advance, it is assumed, firstly, that the enemy would have been in a state of demoralisation equal to that which obtained at the time of Lord Roberts's entry; secondly, that the operations preceding the occupation of the capital would have been far less expensive in material; thirdly, that a sufficient reserve of supplies could have been rapidly obtained.

These are large hypotheses, and their soundness can only be tested to a very limited extent. Any attempt to work out the alternatives involved in a course of military action can only end in a maze of uncertainties and suppositions; any one of which, if it prove false, must stultify the rest. So much depends on the results of the first collision with the enemy; so many are the unknown factors which will influence the final result. However useful as a strategical exercise a deductive process of this kind may be, it rests on too slight a foundation to be of much assistance in forming a historical judgment. He who relies on it

[1] Lord Wolseley, speaking loosely, attributed the relief of Ladysmith to "the occupation of Bloemfontein" (Commission 9109). Of course the occupation took place a fortnight after Ladysmith was relieved. The lightening of the pressure in Natal and on the Orange River began between February 14th and February 20th, and was due to the plight to which Roberts's operations had reduced Cronje. Ladysmith was actually relieved the day after the surrender of Paardeberg.

places himself very much in the position of a general at the beginning of a campaign, with these important differences, that he knows more on some points and less on others than the commander; that while the latter may have an opportunity of testing the correctness of his judgment, he himself will have none; and that whereas he condemns a line of action on the ground of drawbacks which have been made manifest by the event, those which would have attended the course he approves are less obvious, and are often overlooked altogether. For all these reasons a comparison of alternative policies is beset with difficulties.

We have already referred to Lord Roberts's reasons for adopting the Modder route.[1] The opportunities it offered for a surprise, the control of the bridge at Orange River station, the comparative openness of the country, the vulnerability of the enemy's strategic position and the desirability of relieving Kimberley, were factors more favourable to the striking of a quick and decisive blow than any that obtained on the line of advance from Norval's Pont. When Lord Roberts reached South Africa such a blow was urgently needed. Had he had more time and means at his disposal, had Kimberley been unmolested by the enemy, or more capable of resisting a siege, had the situation in Natal been less critical, the arguments in favour of a systematic advance through Cape Colony and up to Bloemfontein by Norval's Pont would have possessed greater force. Under more favourable conditions it would have been possible to sacrifice rapidity and suddenness to a slower but more regular method of conquest. But at the beginning of February it was less a question of the methodical subjugation of the enemy's territories than of the speedy improvement of the general position of affairs. The choice of route was dictated by a condition of things totally different to that on which the original scheme had been based. Some swift victory had to be won; the lost initiative had to be regained; the moral ascendency restored; and of such a result the Modder route undoubtedly offered the best chances. To have subordinated, in the face of a situation so critical, the measures of the moment to the possibilities of an uncertain future would assuredly have been to make the best the enemy of the good.

[1] See Chapter XI.

If this summary of the situation with which Lord Roberts had to deal in February be accurate, his choice of route needs no further justification. But it may further be questioned whether an advance from Norval's Pont would have neutralised the drawbacks that attended the cross-country march to the extent that Lord Wolseley seems to think. He attributes them to the absence of a railway; and he bases his preference for the original scheme on the ground that its adoption would have ensured the possession of that most important auxiliary. Both these propositions contain a degree of truth, but their unqualified enunciation is misleading. It is a curious fact that at the time of greatest want, during the period between February 11th and March 6th, the British Army was within 30 miles of and in uninterrupted communication with the Kimberley line. During the twenty-two days when Lord Roberts was really cut off from railway supply (March 7th to 28th)—however critical the position of the army, and however regrettable the delay in accumulating sufficient reserves at Bloemfontein—the troops suffered less than in the first half of the operations. The regularity of supply on either line depended to a large extent on the speed of the movement. Had Lord Roberts in his advance on Kimberley moved as slowly as General Buller did to Potgieter's Drift, the work of the supply department would have been greatly facilitated. It is easy to conceive of a rate of advance so slow as altogether to free an army from anxiety on the score of food.[1] But had such a course been pursued Cronje would have escaped; and the enemy would have gained time to collect reinforcements and to oppose the advance in prepared positions. On the southern route also rapidity offered a prospect of hardship and success; delay one of comfort and failure. Until railway communication had been re-established Lord Roberts would, if anything, have been more dependent on ox- and mule-transport than in his march along the Modder. In the latter case, so soon as Kimberley had been relieved, he was able to establish a double line of communication with the railway at that town and at Modder Camp; and the only limit to his supplies was his want of waggon-transport. At Norval's Pont, on the other hand,

[1] The extreme form of this would have been the building of a line from Jacobsdal to Bloemfontein.

he would have been separated for a fortnight from his railhead by the broad stream of the Orange, and would have had to depend for his food and forage entirely upon the wire hawser, and the pontoon-bridges. Two courses, roughly speaking, would have been open to him. He might have halted the army on the northern bank, and postponed his advance on Bloemfontein until the bridges were restored. Such an alternative, which would have given the Boers a fortnight in which to prepare and would have sacrificed every advantage which might accrue from rapidity, was the last that he would have been likely to choose. It is far more probable that he would have advanced as soon as his waggon convoys had reached the northern bank and attacked the enemy wherever they attempted to stand. Had he so decided, the army would have had to rely upon the same kind of transport as attended its march through Ramdam to the Modder; the advantages of the railway would probably not have been felt until the moment of collision and crisis had passed; and it is quite likely that the main encounters would have taken place at a point much further from the railhead at Norval's Pont than was Paardeberg from Modder Camp. In that case the difficulties of supply would have been increased; and a mishap, such as occurred at Waterval, would have had a proportionately more serious effect.

Of course, if, contrary to reasonable expectation, the first operations had proved as successful as those on the Modder, the earlier reparation of the railway and the bridges would have been a most important gain. Had Lord Roberts begun his advance from Naauwpoort or Arundel on February 11th, it is probable that by the 18th (the day of the action at Paardeberg) he would have effected a lodgment on the north bank of the Orange River.[1] If the repairs of the bridge had been put in hand by the 20th, Norval's Pont would probably have been ready for traffic by the 8th of March, instead of 21 days later; and, wherever the railhead happened to be, whether at Bloemfontein or at a point south of it, the army would from that moment have been in railway communication with

[1] It is possible that we are underrating the time which the advance to the river and the launching of the pontoons would have taken. General Clements did not throw his bridge until several days after the enemy had abandoned the southern bank. It must however be remembered that he had few ox-waggons available for the transport of the material.

its base. The sixteen days at Bloemfontein, cut off from all sources of adequate supply, were the price that Lord Roberts had to pay for the military advantages of the Modder route. That during that anxious time he was not seriously molested by the enemy was directly due to their preceding defeats. Not until March 28th did De Wet move southward from Brandfort.

What the effects of the earlier re-establishment of the railway upon after events would have been it is impossible to say. They would have depended on many factors; on the numbers of the army and the condition of the different arms at the moment of its arrival at Bloemfontein; on the amount of fresh equipment, baggage, remounts, ammunition, medical stores and transport that would have been necessary; on the situation of the enemy; on the possibility of pushing northwards without reinforcements; on the length of time which would have been required to accumulate supplies. How such questions would have been answered is, and will probably remain, a matter of individual opinion. That under the most favourable circumstances the adoption of the line of advance from Norval's Pont would have rendered the army immune from heavy losses in equipment and horseflesh we do not believe.[1] During the first part, perhaps the greater part, of the march the railway would not have been in working order; later on, its employment could only have lessened without eliminating the factors of hardship and want. If troops are to avoid suffering altogether they must be kept within a few miles of the railhead; and such a system, as was shown in the opening months of the war, is totally incompatible with a free and vigorous conduct of operations. Had Lord Roberts chosen the Norval's Pont route we may be sure that he would have insisted on rapidity of movement. The advanced and flanking columns would have had to live as they could, relying partly on convoys, partly on the scanty resources of the country; and would have been handicapped by that absence of water which operated so fatally during the march to Kimberley, and seems to be a more or less permanent factor in South African warfare. The existence of a single line of rail, perhaps 30 miles distant, would have been as little use to the troops closest to the enemy as was the Modder railhead to the

[1] Compare the losses during the march on Kroonstadt and Pretoria.

cavalry division when it marched from Ramdam to Kimberley. The function of a railway, from its very nature, consists in rapidly forwarding large masses of stores to points which have already been secured; not in satisfying the sudden needs of troops scattered at varying distances along the fighting front. The main advantage of the Norval's Pont route consisted in the facilities for the speedier accumulation of great magazines which the earlier restoration of the line and bridges would have provided: but that the troops would have derived much benefit from the magazines during the march itself seems very improbable.

It would appear then, so far as the labours and privations of the troops were concerned, that the difference between the two lines of advance was not so great as has been sometimes supposed. And it may be said at once that the rapid and continuous movement of a large force, whether assisted by a railway or not, under conditions similar to those which Lord Roberts had to confront was bound to result in heavy loss. We do not suggest that these alone are accountable for the demobilisation of his army. But so far as his personal responsibility is concerned it is fair to remember that he was in some degree handicapped by the novelty of the plan. His campaign in its conception and execution was a daring experiment. It was one of his principal merits and one of the chief causes of his success that he freed himself from the cramped and timid methods of the early part of the war, and undertook an enterprise which his adversary never expected him to attempt. But the plan involved the drawbacks as well as the advantages of an experiment. The boldness of the departure, and the haste with which it had to be initiated, naturally showed themselves in deficiencies of preparation. If at the present time another general was called upon to face the same situation, it is likely that his performances would be marked by a higher degree of mechanical perfection. He would have profited by the experience of Waterval, of the march to Kimberley, and of Paardeberg. He would endeavour to provide a larger and more efficient transport; he would take greater precaution to ensure its safety; he would concentrate his attention more fixedly upon the enemy's army, and would avoid the eccentric movement between Kimberley and the Modder. Had Lord Roberts acted thus his losses would in all probability have been greatly reduced.

However regarded, the march along the Modder to Bloemfontein furnishes a remarkable instance of how rapidly, under unfavourable conditions, an army reaches the limit of its strength. Considered merely from the point of view of time and distance, the efforts demanded of the troops did not exceed those which vigorous commanders have often asked before and will again. During the thirty-one days the operations lasted, not more than half, so far as the infantry were concerned, were occupied in marching or fighting. In that time the different brigades traversed on an average 120 miles each. Owing probably to the invigorating atmosphere of South Africa, the heat of the sun and the cold of the drenched bivouacs were often suffered without affecting, at any rate permanently, the powers of the troops; and stragglers, to the honour of the infantry be it said, were throughout the march conspicuous by their absence. It was only when to hard work, heat and cold, were added insufficient food, bad water, and the pestilential atmosphere of Paardeberg, that a breakdown later on became inevitable.

In the case of the mounted troops, as in that of the infantry, the distances covered furnish no criterion of their exertions. During the month, including movements on the lines of investment at Paardeberg, and reconnaissances before the battle of Poplar Grove, the cavalry division probably did not cover much more than 300 miles. For horses in hard condition at the start, and properly fed and watered throughout, this was not an extraordinary performance. Even in the first week of the campaign the distance traversed by each brigade averaged only about 120 miles, or less than 20 miles a day. It would be easy to find many instances in history in which these results have been far surpassed.[1] But it

[1] For instance, in India in the year 1803 Wellesley's cavalry on one occasion marched 60 miles in 24 hours. Before Furrukabad, Lake covered 74 miles in the same time. In 1862, Stuart, in his famous march round McLellan's rear, which included the forcing of the Potomac, covered 96 miles in 36 hours, Burbridge, in 1864, in the forced marches to surprise Morgan went 90 miles in 30 hours. Morgan himself, two years before, during his march into Kentucky, covered 300 miles in 8 days; in 25 days he traversed the astonishing distance of 1,000 miles, returning with 1,200 men in place of the 900 with which he had set out. In most of these instances, however, the horses were in the best of condition, were moving in a country where food and water were plentiful, and carried comparatively light weights. (See Colonel Denison's "History of Cavalry.")

would be very difficult to find instances in which so much has been achieved under conditions so unfavourable. In the first place, many of the horses were not fit at the start. They cannot be regarded as having been really acclimatised; and in South Africa acclimatisation was a matter of more than ordinary importance.[1] This factor, and six weeks of hard work following on a long sea voyage, had prevented any of them from getting into first-rate condition. Another terrible disadvantage lay in the fact that from start to finish they carried weights which after-experience pronounced ridiculous. Early in February Lord Roberts had emphasised the importance of lightening the burden of the troop horse as far as was compatible with efficiency, and had published a scheme of equipment drawn up by Major Rimington, in which, by adopting the lighter Cape Police saddle and discarding less necessary articles, he proposed to effect a reduction of some 40 lbs. Nothing, however, seems to have come of these suggestions, for during the operations which ended at Bloemfontein each horse carried 114 lbs. dead weight. By the end of the war the authorised weight was only 35 lbs., a reduction of nearly six stone. How terribly the earlier loads must have handicapped troops operating against men who rode in light saddles and carried everything but their food, rifles and ammunition in carts, need hardly be pointed out; but however blameable this want of foresight may appear to-day, it is tolerably safe to say that at the time every regular cavalry in the world would have been guilty of the same error. The Russian cavalry carried 119 lbs. dead weight, the Cossack 97 lbs.; the Austrians probably more. The German weights were slightly heavier than those carried by our own cavalry and regular mounted infantry. Brabant's Colonial Division, less fettered by tradition, carried 74 lbs. during their advance to the Orange River.

[1] Captain Hayes, in his book "Among Horses in South Africa," which was published before the great wastage in horse-flesh took place, refers to the "noteworthy fact that English horses which are imported into South Africa take a comparatively long time, probably two years on an average, before they get sufficiently accustomed to life in that country, to thrive and show their proper form there." This he attributes not to climate but to the poor quality of South African hay. He compares South Africa with India, and points out that, although the latter country is much the hotter, the superior quality of its grass and hay is more than sufficient to neutralise the effects of the more tropical climate.

Thus handicapped by want of condition, and greatly overloaded, the horses were called upon to move fast and far in a temperature which, during the march to Kimberley, was excessive even for South Africa. Under such conditions only a liberal allowance of food and water could have kept them efficient. Of the last, even from the beginning, there was a totally inadequate supply; and the difficulty was aggravated by the frequent starts before dawn. Horses, as a rule, will not drink until an hour or so after sunrise, and it frequently happened that owing to want of water on the march, or to a collision with the enemy, they got nothing between sunrise and sundown.[1] As a result the losses by thirst alone were very great; in fact, in the opinion of one of our best officers, this was the principal cause of the breakdown.

Perhaps it would be true to say that while heat and want of water took effect more immediately and fatally, want of food was accountable for the general state of demobilisation in which the division found itself at the moment of entering Bloemfontein. Up to the morning of February 15th the rations had been issued with tolerable regularity,[2] but from that day until the end of Cronje's investment, nearly a fortnight later, the horses got nothing or next to nothing to eat. If, after their return from Kimberley, a plentiful supply of oats and hay had been available, it is likely that they would to some extent have recovered their condition by the day of Poplar Grove. But the fatal loss of the convoy rendered this impossible, and the supply of grass in the neighbourhood was of the scantiest. The result was that they went from bad to worse, and that by the end of the march few regiments could have put more than 150 even moderately effective animals in the field.

We have yet to refer to the question of horsemastership. The importance of this factor is much harder to estimate; for while the harm done by overloading and want of food or water is in some degree reducible to

[1] This was particularly the case on February 16th, when the 1st and 3rd Brigades were completely incapacitated by thirst in the waterless veldt beyond Dronfield.

[2] Though even during the first days of the march General French complains that they were inadequate. Evidence given before the Royal Commission, vol. ii., p. 302.

figures, the ways in which horsemastership manifests itself are only discernible to those on the spot, and vary with the rank of the individual who is called upon to exercise his judgment. Thus the general apportionment of weights and transport or the arrangement for the march are clearly matters in which the divisional commander can show his horsemastership; and so far as the one is unnecessarily heavy or as the other needlessly complicates the question of feeding and watering, he commits an error that may have the most far-reaching consequences. The same remarks apply, though in a less degree, to the brigadier. There is, moreover, a natural tendency on the part of the higher leaders to work the troops at too high a pressure, to gallop when it would be better to trot, or to give the different regiments insufficient time to rest or water. The management of the Horse Artillery furnishes an instance of this lack of consideration. It is quite clear from Colonel Davidson's remarks before the Royal Commission [1] that the want of a representative of that arm on the Divisional Staff—a fact which throws a curious light on the haste of the preparations at Modder River—operated very disadvantageously on the condition of the battery horses; and it is not unreasonable to assume that cases occurred in which the cavalry horses also were pressed without sufficient reason.

Of course, a good deal of unnecessary exertion is bound in the course of a campaign to be required of modern cavalry, for it is quite impossible, in view of the limited time and knowledge available, always to gauge correctly the significance of what is seen and reported. In the case of French's Division it is likely that the inadequate scouting, which the German Staff History regards as partly referable to the condition of the horses, was in itself the cause of needless or over-hurried movements. Again, what may seem an error of judgment from the standpoint of horsemastership may be rendered absolutely necessary by tactical or strategical considerations. When French advanced to force the passage of the Riet, the rapidity of the movement put a very severe strain on the batteries that were attached to his brigades. Yet the success or failure of the operation was a question of minutes, and the possible loss in horses had to be faced. The number and complexity of these reasons

[1] Questions 18672–6–698.

make it very difficult, with the information at present attainable, to say precisely in what degree the higher leaders are to be blamed for needlessly exhausting their horses; how far such mistakes are attributable to errors of training and tradition and to the lack of opportunities in peace time; how far to the failings of individuals. It may, however, safely be concluded that such mistakes were made.

But there is another side of horsemastership which is more a matter of knowledge and routine, and is far less subject to circumstances than the considerations we have mentioned above. This relates to the care of individual horses, to riding discipline, to the judicious use of every available source of food supply. These are principally questions of regimental training. It was to them that Lord Roberts specially referred when, in his confidential order at Bloemfontein, he appealed to the commanding officers "to maintain the efficiency of their respective corps, and to spare no trouble in looking after the feeding and watering of their horses, seeing that the men dismount and that the horses are allowed to graze on every possible opportunity." This order was strongly resented at the time, for it was felt, not unreasonably, that absence of grass, oats, hay, and water throughout the march had rendered the most careful horsemastership vain. The best management in the world would have failed under the conditions which prevailed from February 15th to March 7th. At the same time there is plenty of evidence to show that in some cases a stricter insistence on the necessity of the men dismounting would have appreciably alleviated the condition of the animals; and General French's own evidence before the Royal Commission testifies to the fact that the officers, although in the great majority of cases they spared no pains to keep their horses as efficient as the circumstances permitted, were handicapped by too narrow a peace training. "They understood stable management better than the care of horses in the field," and as a consequence they failed to take full advantage of the various kinds of fodder which the country provided.[1]

[1] General French further stated that the strict orders against looting were the cause of the neglect of many opportunities of foraging. However this may be, an army order was published as early as February 18th directing that the resources of the country

These causes of loss were greatly aggravated by the enormous amount of work of one kind and another that the division was called upon to do. The distances traversed, as we have already said, were not particularly large, but the fact that it was the only body of mounted troops which at the time could be depended on for rapid and extended movements imposed upon it a strain, which it would not be easy to parallel in modern war. From February the 10th to the 23rd it was in the very forefront of the fighting; during those days its brigades were constantly in action, and even during the last eleven days of the halt at Paardeberg the rest afforded was only partial. Never once, so far as we have been able to discover, was it employed in second line, or allowed a period of absolute quiet while its duties were taken over by the mounted infantry. This was inevitable, for at the time the latter were unfit to take its place. But the result was that the demands upon it were probably far greater and more continuous than is ordinarily thrown upon a body of its size in a European war; and every task was magnified by the extreme mobility and elusiveness of its nebulous enemy. Was there any division in the Franco-German war which, in an equal space of time, performed tasks so varied and underwent labours so continuous?[1]

All these factors played a part in the demobilisation of the cavalry. Some of them were matters of internal management; others, as witness the orders for the relief of Kimberley, arose from the plan of operations itself. How far the collapse could have been foreseen is a different question. It was of course obvious that long, fast movements in a barren and waterless country and under a hot sun would take a heavy toll of the endurance of the division. Considerable losses must have been expected from the first. Lord Roberts's long experience in

were to be utilised to the fullest extent, and that in case the inhabitants refused to sell at a fair price the property was to be taken possession of and handed over to the transport and supply department. This order applied to animals as well as stores.

[1] For instance, the duties of strategical reconnaissance during the march on Sedan were carried out by four cavalry divisions on a front about as broad as that on which French's brigades marched during the advance on Bloemfonteim. The general conditions of supply in the Argonne and on the banks of the Aisne and Meuse cannot of course be compared with those encountered on the barren and waterless veldt.

tropical climates prevents any other conclusion, even if his anxiety had not manifested itself in his desire to reduce the weights carried by the horses. But that he or any one else foresaw the total demobilisation of the division was pretty clearly not the case. The amount of its losses completely surprised the remount officers at Capetown, who, had they been expected, would have been warned to prepare to meet them. One most important factor in the loss, the capture of the convoy, was at the beginning beyond the reach of human foresight. Nor could the point have been foretold with exactitude at which the division would become ineffective. Once operations have been begun it is utterly impossible to know what efforts will be required of the troops or how great will be the wastage. At the same time we do not suppose for one moment that had the effects of the march been foreknown, its scope or even the method of its execution would have been materially altered. Lord Roberts's duty was to devise the best plan that the very critical circumstances permitted, and, having done so, to carry it out at all costs. The relief of Kimberley is certainly open to criticism as a strategic operation; but it would be absurd to blame a general, who regarded it as essential, for carrying it out with all the vigour that the means at his disposal allowed. Rightly or wrongly, he considered the operation as absolutely necessary to the success of our arms; the corollary to that determination, as expressed in his speech to his cavalry leaders, was that Kimberley would have to be relieved if it cost them half their forces." How fatally that sentence was endorsed by the result has already been shown.

These reflections lead us to refer to the tactical principle upon which French's advance to Kimberley seems to have been partially based.[1] Throughout his period of command in South Africa Lord Roberts strongly favoured manœuvring his enemy out of the position by turning movements as opposed to direct frontal attack; and he laid great stress on the destruction of the enemy's horses and baggage. The plan of turning Cronje out of Magersfontein, his determination not to attack at Paardeberg and his orders to the Cavalry at Poplar Grove are all instances of this tendency. Assuming the command at a time when frontal attacks had either failed or had been driven

[1] See end of Chapter XIII.

home at the cost of losses disproportionate to those inflicted on the enemy, it is hardly surprising that he held such views; nor is there any doubt that in his adoption of outflanking tactics he saw and appreciated one of the great weaknesses of the methods which, largely owing to lack of mounted men, had up to that time been adopted. But the development of this theory tended more and more towards manœuvre as opposed to fighting, and while loss was thus avoided and the enemy compelled to retire, deprived the British operations of decisive results. Due allowance must of course be made for the intangibility of the enemy; nor does there exist reasonable ground for the inference that against a civilised foe such methods would have been employed. Nevertheless there seems little doubt that British tactics, after beginning with one error, ended with another. In trusting to the weight of a strategic advance, to territorial occupation and to the capture of the enemy's horses and supplies, the Field-Marshal neglected what in the ultimate resort is the only certain means of military conquest, the destruction of life on the battle-field. It is possible that at this period and during the following months, when the enemy were yet unhardened to reverse two or three defeats as bloody as that of Driefontein would have done more to shatter their power of resistance than even the occupation of Bloemfontein and Pretoria. In thinking that the less costly method would be sufficient, the Field-Marshal mistook the character of his enemy. "The long continuance of the South African War," says the German Staff History,[1] "is primarily attributable to the English methods of warfare, by which it was hoped to win decisive victories without heavy losses. 'To sacrifice the life of the soldier in fight, where necessary, is the great law of war, to which soldier and leader alike must with equal willingness submit.'" It may be added that it is only by a full appreciation of this truth and all that it entails, that a nation can properly gauge the seriousness of war, and when once committed to it can accept its conditions with steadfastness; and that it is only when supported in this respect by public opinion that its generals can be expected to carry out their plans with determination and energy.

One more criticism may be noticed here. It is sometimes argued

[1] p. 85.

that in his advance from the Modder the British General employed an unnecessarily large force, which was not required for fighting purposes and greatly complicated the question of supply. It is quite true that in the event two brigades of infantry [1] were never seriously engaged, but that scarcely proves that he was unwise in taking them. In the investment of Cronje five Brigades were employed besides the Cavalry division and the Mounted Infantry; yet no one will pretend that the circle was over-strongly held. A more vigorous attack by the enemy's relieving forces, a contingency which the British Staff had constantly to keep in mind, or another attempt upon the communications would have required the services of all the troops over which Lord Roberts disposed. The fact that such an investment was never contemplated, only proves once more that in war the unexpected always happens, and that it is as well to have as large a margin as possible. Again in the final movement upon Bloemfontein the Field-Marshal had to take into account not only the enemy in his front at Bainsvlei, but the possibility of an attack upon his right from the direction of Springfontein. Moreover it was absolutely necessary with a view to future operations that a force should be established in the neighbourhood of Bloemfontein powerful enough to hold the town and railway, and to provide flying columns to clear the surrounding country.[2] The heaping up of the Army round the town in March and April, a disposition apparently due to difficulties of supply, was certainly carried to an extreme; but the value of a strong central mass was shown when the reoccupation by the enemy of Brandfort and Ladybrand and the neighbourhood of Wepener necessitated the despatch of a number of columns north, east, and south, to clear the threatened flank. In view of the immense size of the theatre of war, the numerous tasks devolving on the army, the pressing need of decisive success and the results of the earlier employment of small detached columns, we do not see how it can be maintained that the invading army could safely have been decreased.[3] That the necessity

[1] 15th Brigade and the Guards Brigade.

[2] This consideration seems to dispose of the view that a small flying column should have been despatched to Bloemfontein in the first instance before the main body advanced up the railway from Norval's Pont. If such a column had reached Bloemfontein what would it have done?

[3] After all it did not greatly exceed the force under Sir Redvers Buller.

of employing a large force increased the difficulties[1] of supply was inevitable. The old prophecy that in Spain small armies would be beaten and large armies would starve, sometimes came near to realisation in South Africa. The conditions of the campaign recalls in this particular the era of the Seven Years' War. Once more the magazine becomes the only source of supply; once more the strategic freedom of all columns is strictly limited by what they can carry or by what can be forwarded to them from a temporary base. On the resources of the theatre of operations only a very restricted reliance can be placed,[2] and not even for a day can a large force safely depend on what the neighbourhood can afford. It would not be difficult to find South African parallels to the loss of the convoy which compelled Frederick the Great to abandon the siege of Olmütz, or to discover in the slow and halting progress of some of our columns operations not unworthy of the name and reputation of the much-derided Daun. The only way in which the conditions of supply differed from those of the eighteenth century was in the existence of the railways. Few and insecure as these were they just rendered the difficulties superable; for wherever they were in working order they made possible the formation of magazines and the undertaking of expeditions which without them, owing to the size of the country, would have been totally impracticable.[3] But so soon as the columns left them behind the old obstacles to mobility reasserted themselves. When indeed we call to mind the later periods of the war, the constant pauses to rest and refit of all columns whether great or small, the enormous difficulties which the vast and barren theatre

[1] It must be remembered, however, that even a small force cannot take more than a certain amount of supplies with it. The greater the quantity of transport the more troops are needed to guard it.

[2] According to Prince Hohenlohe, the Germans in 1870 obtained a third of their food and forage by requisitioning.

[3] These remarks, of course, do not affect the question of the choice of routes for the march to Bloemfontein. In the first place, the railway between Norval's Pont and Bloemfontein would not have been in working order for at least a fortnight after the passage of the Orange River was made; in the second, the sentence under discussion refers principally to the action of the numerous small columns which, during the last portion of the struggle, penetrated to every part of the Dutch Republics. In no sense, of course, is it suggested, that our armies should have operated along the railways only. Long before Lord Roberts arrived the inadequency of such a method had been conclusively proved.

and the enemy's tactics imposed upon our most experienced soldiers, and the appalling waste of animals which continued until the close of hostilities, we are compelled to attribute the demobilisation of Lord Roberts's army not simply to faults in execution, though these unquestionably played a part, but also to the inherent difficulties of South African campaigning.

That in spite of mistakes and the difficulties arising from them a great success was achieved must, in the first place, be ascribed to the vigour and resolution of the British generalship. If for the first time it was possible, in the words of Von der Goltz, to get together "a real army . . . sufficient to deal an important blow," for the first time also were the operations marked by singleness of aim and great boldness and energy in execution. The different measures that were adopted, whether good or bad, were strongly marked. "Lord Roberts," says the above writer, "carried on the war on big lines." For the first time a leader appeared who carried the heavy burden of responsibility with real strength and elasticity of tread. Foreign critics have not been over-ready to eulogise our soldiers or their generals, and Captain Fournier is no exception to the general rule. His testimony, therefore, is the more valuable. "The single fact," he says, "of having known how to break away from the errors persisted in up to that moment gives a high idea of the energetic qualities of the Commander and of his Chief of the Staff. . . . If one reflects on the conditions under which he [Lord Roberts] was moving from the railway, with insufficient convoys, having on his rear parties of the enemy of whose strength and designs he was ignorant; one will recognise in his decision of February 15th[1] the mark of a strong character, as well as of a just conception of the situation." Above all, he had at his command those qualities of "activity and initiative," to which, in Prince Hohenlohe's opinion, the great commanders of all ages have owed more than to their intellectual eminence. It is his strongest claim to greatness that he possessed the high and essential quality of daring, of

[1] The author apparently refers to Lord Roberts's decision after the Waterval disaster. See "La Guerre Sud-Africaine," published under the direction of the 3rd Bureau of the French General Staff. Vol. iii.

readiness to face the risks imposed by an uncertain situation. It is possible, even probable, that weight of numbers would ultimately have turned the scale. But had the British forces been directed with less resolution and energy, not only would the results in the theatre of war have been less decisive and convincing, but the risk of external complications of the most serious kind would have been greatly increased. To his own unflagging optimism, and to his good fortune in possessing in Lord Kitchener and General French two subordinates of exceptional activity and determination, were due the sudden and overwhelming change in the fortunes of the struggle in South Africa, and the vindication of the might of the British Empire in the eyes of a hostile and jealous world.

The great efforts of the British Army received their reward, as do all such efforts which are resolutely directed to one end and backed by sufficient strength. The capture of Bloemfontein is a landmark in the history of the war in some respects more important than the occupation of Pretoria. It marked the establishment of our superiority in the field, the end of the invasion of Cape Colony, and the collapse of the earlier Boer system. The enemy were not slow to take the lessons of the preceding month to heart. At the Council of Kroonstadt it was decided that the cumbersome laagers should be given up and the main reliance placed on the isolated action of mobile columns against the weak points of the invading army. The period of the *grande guerre*, so far as the enemy were concerned, draws near its close, and the first step is taken towards the *petite guerre*, which aims not at decisive victory but at partial and incidental gain. The efforts of the Boer leaders, many as were to be their successes, could henceforth only prolong the struggle; by themselves they could never influence its result. They threatened but they never shook the British hold upon the country. The entry into Pretoria, which it was hoped at one moment would end the war, must from this point of view be regarded simply as a step in that necessary occupation of the chief commercial and political centres, which must follow the break up of the main armies of the defenders, and is the first stage in the subjugation of the country itself. The development of the final stage, which consisted in the gradual absorption of

every means of resistance open to the defenders, was necessarily slow and uneven. The period of transition which had to elapse between it and the earlier stage of occupation, was prolonged by the activity of the enemy and by the fact that the significance of the change in the character of the war was not at once adequately recognised. The result was hurry and lack of system. Not until under Lord Kitchener's leadership the nature of the Boer resistance was understood, and the army organised to deal with it, did the last act of the struggle commence. From that time, in spite of recrudescences of hostile activity, of reverses, raids, and revolts, the process of exhaustion, directed by the indomitable energy of the British General, moves slowly to its inevitable conclusion. As the resources of the Boers become more and more local the methods of the conquerors grow more and more akin to those of a vast and overwhelming force of police. The bases of the defenders shrink from states and territories to districts, to towns, to farms; their armies in the same way dwindle to commandos, to small bands, to individuals; their areas of operations are gradually circumscribed by a network of fortified posts, railways, and blockhouses. A system of conquest by triangulation is developed, until at last the want of warlike stores, food, forage, and cover compel the gallant remnant to yield. Never perhaps since the time of the Roman Empire did the so-called guerilla system receive a more thorough trial than in South Africa; and never was its ultimate futility more fully demonstrated.

But of all the remarkable features of that extraordinary struggle perhaps the most striking was the restraint of both sides and the rarity of acts bearing the mark of vindictiveness and exasperation. To the very end, though desperate fighting was not infrequent, though peace up to the last moment seemed remote, the British never lost their attitude of coolness and patience; nor did the Boers, in spite of the growing hopelessness of their task and the necessary severity of some of their opponents' measures, adopt a policy of savage and bloodthirsty reprisals. At no moment could it reasonably have been said of either side that

> "War wearied had performed what war could do,
> And to disordered rage let loose the reins."

On the side of the conquerors, indeed, a generally strict discipline, the scrutiny of a highly organised press, traditions of national benevolence, and the chivalry of the English character, were strong aids in the cause of humanity. But at the hands of the Boers, whose fathers had been reared in the bloody school of native warfare, who were themselves unchecked by the restraining influences which govern a regular army, who were condemned to watch, month after month, the gradual destruction of their homes, their property, and their hopes of political independence, less might have been expected and received. That, in spite of all, they forbore to repay severity with cruelty and desolation with murder; that their attitude on the whole was honourable and, if the term in such a connection be allowable, law-abiding; that while prosecuting the struggle with the bitterness and obstinacy peculiar to their long-memoried race they still knew how to distinguish between the policy that they combated and the individuals who were its instruments, are facts which convey at once a warning and an encouragement to the new rulers of South Africa; and will be recognised by the future historian as a fresh and remarkable illustration of the vitality of racial characteristics under circumstances that most nearly threaten their extinction.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF LADYSMITH

As early as 1881, in which year Sir Redvers Buller examined its neighbourhood with a view to defending it against the Boers, at that time unpossessed of artillery, Ladysmith had been recognised as a point of strategic importance. Its geographical situation at the meeting-place of all the roads and valleys north of the Tugela and its control of the best fords of the Klip River made it the most important commercial centre and afterwards the most considerable railway junction in Northern Natal. Far less exposed than Newcastle to raid or invasion from the neighbouring Republics, covered to the north by the imposing barrier of the Biggarsberg and completely commanding all the arteries of supply its military value was no less obvious. In any scheme of defence for the British territory north of the Tugela it was bound to occupy a prominent place.

But in the years of peace which succeeded the campaign of Majuba, military considerations had fallen into the background; and it was not until after the Raid had increased and emphasised the possibility of a rupture with the Transvaal that the attention of soldiers again began to be directed to Natal. In the event of war it was practically certain that the main Boer attack would be directed against the northern portion of that Colony; and from 1896 onwards the various methods of meeting an invasion were repeatedly discussed by the British War Office.

In April, 1897, Sir John Ardagh pointed out the necessity of safeguarding the railways and main strategic points with a view to an offensive against the Transvaal; and in the same month General Goodenough, commenting on Major-General Cox's proposals for the distribution of the existing garrison [1] of Natal, advised that no point should be held north of Ladysmith, and that the railway to the south should be guarded by posts at Colenso and Estcourt. Side by side with purely military considerations, political and other factors now began to play their part. In May, a reinforcement of three batteries of field artillery, and two battalions was stationed

[1] Then consisting of 1 battalion, 1 regiment of cavalry, 2 guns, and 1 company of Mounted Infantry.

at Ladysmith; the reason for this choice, according to Lord Lansdowne,[1] being the better hygienic condition of the town as compared with that of Pietermaritzburg; according to Colonel Altham,[2] a compromise between the wish of the Natal Government to push the troops up to Newcastle and Sir Alfred Milner's unwillingness on political grounds to place them so near the Transvaal frontier.[3] In any case the position of the newly arrived force was not determined, nor at that time was it necessary that it should be determined, by military considerations. Ladysmith was regarded purely in the light of a peace-station.

The reinforcements of May did not, however, allay Goodenough's anxiety for the safety of the northern triangle, and he was asked for a fresh scheme of defence. His proposals, which were sent home in July, included the defence of Glencoe, Dundee, and the Biggarsberg, the observation of the Drakensberg passes, and the eventual entrenchment of Van Reenan. He estimated the invading force at anything between 5,000 and 10,000 men, and considered that a garrison of three battalions would not render Lang's Nek tenable. His scheme of distribution—a strangely ambitious one in the light of after events—was approved by the War Office in September. Sir Alfred Milner's letters of the following February (1898) regarding the want of transport led to a suggestion from Lord Wolseley that two months' supplies should be sent as a preliminary measure to the troops quartered at Ladysmith;[4] but the proposal was not acted upon, and the only step taken was the compilation of a scheme of transport which was not in accordance with Goodenough's suggested distribution of the troops. Eight months later the distribution itself was criticised by Sir Evelyn Wood in a letter[5] to Lord Wolseley, in which while maintaining that Natal's true line of defence was the Biggarsberg, he expressed the view that the importance of Van Reenan was insufficiently realised. It must be carefully borne in mind that almost up to the outbreak of hostilities the military authorities were hampered by their uncertainty as to the attitude of the Free State, a factor upon which the strategic value of Van Reenan and of the Biggarsberg almost entirely depended.

The increase of the Boer armaments and the heightened political tension of 1898, called forth Colonel Altham's long memorandum of September; and three months later[6] a War Office letter was despatched to Sir William Butler, the new General Officer commanding in South Africa, asking for a full statement of forces and a definite plan of frontier defence. In June, 1899, four months before the outbreak of the war, this was completed and sent home. Butler's views considerably differed from those of Goodenough; and so far as the published papers and evidence reveal the intentions of the two soldiers, his scheme seems the more elastic and comprehensive. Regarding the immediate occupation of Lang's Nek

[1] Report of the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Minutes of Evidence. Vol. II. Question 21265.

[2] Ditto. Minutes of Evidence. Vol. I. Question 530–1.

[3] Ditto. Minutes of Evidence. Vol. II. Question 21265.

[4] Then consisting of 1 battalion, 1 cavalry regiment, 3 field batteries, 1 mountain battery, and 1 company of Mounted Infantry.

[5] February 23, 1897.

[6] December 21, 1898.

as risky and unprofitable, he proposed to move the troops at Ladysmith to Glencoe, to push his cavalry well out towards the Drakensberg and Buffalo, leaving a small force of all arms on the Biggarsberg, and to occupy Ladysmith itself with the troops quartered at Pietermaritzburg. The occupation of Van Reenan would depend on the attitude of the Orange Free State. He intended to hold the railway line from Newcastle to Estcourt with small entrenched posts; and he explained afterwards to the Commission that he had contemplated an assemblage of stores at Maritzburg or Estcourt or further north, according as the situation developed. On the same consideration would have depended the employment and concentration of his fighting troops. Their position as laid down in his paper scheme was merely intended as preparatory, and could have been changed according to circumstances. In the case of an invasion in force he contemplated a retirement to Estcourt. [1]

These various schemes of defence possess one aspect in common. Different as are the estimates of the enemy on which they are based, they all agree in *not* regarding Ladysmith as a great fortress to be held at all costs. It was looked upon first as a convenient peace cantonment, afterwards as a good temporary position for troops about to take part in the active defence of the Colony. As hostilities became imminent it inevitably grew in importance as an advance depôt for the field army.

It is quite clear that this was the light in which Lord Wolseley, perhaps the most brilliant English soldier that the last half century has produced, regarded it; and in the evidence he gave before the Royal Commission [2] he traced the main lines of the course he himself would have adopted had he commanded the Natal Field Force. In the event of war with the Transvaal alone he seems to have counted with confidence on the safe withdrawal of the outlying posts, and the successful maintenance of the Biggarsberg; [3] and until this became impossible he intended Ladysmith to serve as an advanced base of supply to the combatant forces in front. He believed, and no doubt others believed with him, that the town would be out of reach of an invasion of the northern triangle [4] and that therefore the punctual supply of the army would be best ensured by a full use of its capacity as a railway junction and magazine. [5] But once the line of the Biggarsberg owing to hostile pressure either from Van Reenan or from the north became untenable, he had no intention of attempting to defend Ladysmith itself. In that case he would have

[1] Royal Commission. Evidence. Vol. II. Questions 13440–9. Napoleon's views as to the alternative of retaining Ratisbon, or falling back to the Lech in 1809, furnish in some respects an interesting commentary on the situation in Natal in October, 1899. [2] Vol. I., 8862–85.

[3] Col. Altham in his memorandum of 6th June, 1899, assumed that the conclusion of the defensive phase would find us in possession of Van Reenan and the Biggarsberg.

[4] Ardagh, 5178.

[5] Lord Roberts condemns the selection of Ladysmith as the principal military station and advance depôt in Natal (10183) inasmuch as it was in front of a river (*i.e.*, of a defile) and therefore a bad place at which to collect stores (10231). It must be remembered, however, that it was chosen at a time when no one expected that the Boer invasion would be as serious as it proved, and when Glencoe was still occupied. The error throughout lay in the miscalculation of the enemy's strength.

abandoned the town and anything it might contain and renewed the struggle behind the barrier of the Tugela. The definiteness of his views on this point is well shown by his letter to Lord Lansdowne on the 18th of August, in which he pointed out that unless we could hold the northern triangle with at least 10,000 men we could be easily turned out of Ladysmith and all the positions north of the town, and added that even after the extra troops,[1] then on the way, had reached Natal an advance on our rear would compel us to fall back on the Tugela at Colenso. The difference of his standpoint from that of Sir R. Buller[2] seems to lie in this, that while the latter was quite prepared to withdraw from Northern Natal and devote all his energies to a defence of the Tugela, the Commander-in-Chief recognised the serious loss of prestige and territory that such a retirement would involve, and felt that our defence of the Colony could not be termed successful unless our position beyond the river were strongly maintained. At the same time, although he regarded a retirement over the Tugela as equivalent to failure, such a course was to his mind infinitely more preferable than that of being besieged in Ladysmith.

No doubt this view was from a purely military standpoint correct, and when Sir George White landed in Natal there was nothing in the distribution of the means at his disposal which prevented its adoption. On October 7th his hands, so far as the previous arrangements were concerned, were still untied. He could still have concentrated anywhere he chose between Newcastle to Pietermaritzburg; either, as Hunter would have preferred,[3] to attack the Boers at the passes; or to manœuvre from a central position at Ladysmith, Sunday's River or the Biggarsberg, in accordance with the wishes of Ian Hamilton and French; or to defend the line of the Tugela or Estcourt, in agreement with the opinions of Buller and Butler. Nor was he then hampered by the distribution of his supplies. On October 7th all the posts, including Ladysmith (then garrisoned by 1,870 men and 1,000 horses) had sixty days' provisions[4] in store for their garrisons, but at no place was there any mass of supplies great enough to infuse doubt into the mind of a general as to the advisability of abandoning it on the score of the material loss alone. The Indian contingent, which was to bring with it three months' supplies, was only just arriving; and Lieutenant-Colonel Morgan,[5] the supply officer at Durban, in default of orders from home, had only been able to make a few small purchases. The concentration of the great mass of stores at Ladysmith was directly due to White

[1] Amounting to from 2,000–3,000 men.

[2] General Buller's evidence, Question 14980: "The apex of the triangle which Natal forms is mostly a Dutch district, and that I should have given up and massed the troops in positions where they would be mutually supporting covering the ground south of the Tugela."

[3] 14504.

[4] Butler (13593) had put sixty days' stores into Ladysmith when he reached South Africa. Early in September, 1899, Wolseley, at the request of Buller, who feared that the force at Glencoe would be isolated, had despatched orders that all the posts in Natal were to be filled up to at least sixty days. (15012. 15294).

[5] 18333 *et seq.* None of the supplies announced from England had arrived before Ladysmith was invested. The first month's supply was only completed in England on October 28th and the whole was not shipped till October 30th the date of the decisive battle of Lombard's Kop. See Secretary of State to Buller No. 32, 4th November, 5 p.m.

himself, who on or about October 8th directed Morgan to buy up all the supplies he could and pour them into the town. At the moment, however, we do not see what other possible alternative was open to him. It is but fair to remember that he arrived without any definite views as to the lines on which he was to conduct his defence. No general plan of campaign had been formed; few or none of the principal alternatives had been thoroughly discussed. Nothing for instance seems to have passed as to the possible effects of a retirement as far as Estcourt on the political situation; nor does Sir George White appear to have been possessed of the views of the Imperial Government or of the Commander-in-Chief as to the balance that he was to strike between the political and military considerations that together make up strategy. It is not suggested that the details could have been laid down beforehand, but to any one in Sir George's position some knowledge of the way in which the anthorities envisaged the different aspects of the problem he was required to solve would have been exceedingly useful, and would have enabled him to maintain a stronger attitude in face of local opinion. While on the one side he was allowed a perfectly free hand as to the dispositions he thought necessary, on the other he was brought into contact with the Natal authorities, unprovided with anything that might act as a counterpoise to their views. It was therefore natural that having nothing else to go upon he should surrender himself to their judgment, and if there be any truth in the criticism that his view of the situation lacked width, the want of opportunities for widening it should also be remembered. It is certainly probable that for reasons we shall refer to below his action would in any case have been the same; but it is scarcely reasonable to censure him for not adopting alternatives the desirability or possibility of which at the moment of decision was not fully before him.

The views of the authorities in Natal are well known. At the moment of Sir George's arrival probably no one regarded the question of the retention or abandonment of Ladysmith as likely to arise. The Government of the Colony was naturally anxious that the troops should occupy as advanced a position as possible. The promise had been given that Natal should be defended with the whole strength of the Empire; Glencoe had been occupied, and a retirement was regarded as likely to end in a native rebellion. The enemy's capacity for organised invasion was underrated. The soldiers were confident. General Hunter favoured a resolute offensive towards the passes. General Penn-Symons was optimistic. No one, at any rate, debated the possibility of a retirement behind the Tugela. The campaign was to be fought out in Northern Natal, and on that assumption it was inevitable that Ladysmith should become the base and pivot of the operations.[1]

Sir George White took the same view. Although inclined to estimate the fighting power of the enemy more highly than some of his advisers and anxious as to the isolated position of Penn-Symons, he never seems to have felt any doubts as to the main result or to have feared the issue of a general collision north of the Tugela. An offensive policy, indeed, he discarded as too risky in face of the superior

[1] This is apparently what Lord Roberts meant when he said (Question 10210) that Ladysmith "had been approved as a place to hold on to."

numbers [1] and mobility of the enemy, the outflanking frontier of the Free State, the enormously strong defensive positions open to the Boers on the north and west, and their numerous and well-covered lines of retreat.[2] But from the first he seems to have counted with confidence on definite success in the neighbourhood of Ladysmith. Everything that he heard and saw encouraged him to regard the town as the true and final point of resistance, as well as "the most advanced post that could practically be held against the two main divisions of the Boer Army . . . as a shield to cover the vitals of Natal"; and it is clear that at the commencement of the campaign he calculated on defending Southern Natal by victory in the field. As the incompleteness of the fortifications of the town showed, he regarded the possibilities of failure as extremely remote.[3] The alternatives of investment or retreat do not seem to have taken definite form in his mind until the staggering blow of Lombard's Kop forced them upon him.

It is probable that his view of the situation, far from savouring of rashness, must at the time have appeared an unduly modest estimate of what could be done. To have gone farther in the same direction, to have commenced preparations for a retreat in the first part of October, would have been regarded as the height of timidity. The possible need of a retirement to Colenso or the Mooi River had been scarcely adumbrated at home; it was inconceivable in Natal. To have seriously contemplated such a step would have demanded an extraordinary degree of courage and foresight, an exceptional independence of judgment. The advisability of such a course, even if due preparations had been made, would have seemed—as indeed up to this moment it remains—questionable in the extreme. How much more difficult was an abandonment of Ladysmith and a reversal of all previous arrangements on the night of October 30th, at a time when no such preparations had been attempted!

Lord Wolseley has passed a sweeping condemnation of the policy of remaining at Ladysmith. "If I was in command of such a force as was then in Natal, and had at that time fully realised (because they did) that there was a large force of the enemy coming against me, nothing in the world would have induced me to stay in Ladysmith; I would have burnt my supplies sooner than have stayed there. I would have fallen back behind the next line, which is at Colenso, and behind the river. . . . I should have fallen back . . . when the attacks which took place at Glencoe made it quite evident they were coming down, and also coming from Van Reenan's Pass on the left flank in large force. . . . You have these several positions

[1] Estimated on October 12th at 27,000, and on October 22nd as 24,800 men and 30 guns. (White to Secretary of State).

[2] The Biggarsberg position he discarded as being without provisions, as turned by the Free State roads and railway and as deficient in water supply. Of the Sunday's River Bridge position, twenty miles north of Ladysmith, which lay amongst the lower spurs of the Biggarsberg and was the probable meeting-place of the Transvaalers and Free Staters (Hunter, 14523–6) he makes no mention. Presumably he regarded it as equivalent to a defence of the Biggarsberg.

[3] Altham, 674–5. The works were to consist of field entrenchments only. No doubt they were merely intended to provide against Boer raids when the main force was absent.

(*i.e.*, the Biggarsberg, Colenso, &c.), one behind the other, for carrying out a certain resistance and prolonging the resistance and detaining the enemy until your reinforcements came up from the rear." [1]

This is the view of an exceptionally resolute, self-confident, and daring soldier It is strictly in accordance with the accepted principles of war. The criticism is the same as that which has been passed on Bazaine's fatal entanglement at Metz; and the history of the Ladysmith force, in all but its more fortunate conclusion, closely resembles that of other field armies which have been prevented from playing their proper *rôle* by being driven under the walls of a fortress. "Most dubious," says Von der Goltz, "is that advantage which is made so much of, namely, that a defeated army can find protection behind the forts of a fortress, and rally and rest there, and then break out afresh. . . . *Great armies, which are shut up in a fortress after lost battles, are, as the history of investments from Alesia down to Metz proves, almost always lost.*" The offensive power of White was annihilated. Nor can it be claimed that as a containing force he was justified in allowing himself to be shut up, for his *rôle*, though secondary, was of essential importance, and his troops were the only ones available to play it. His decision, therefore, can only be justified on the plea of sheer necessity.

That the special circumstances were extraordinarily strong we have already shown in the text; and although it is just possible, viewed in the light of after events, that a defensive attitude behind the Tugela might have saved Southern Natal from invasion, we still cannot help feeling that at the moment, taking everything into consideration, Sir George's decision was the only one possible under the circumstances. The risks of the alternative advocated by Lord Wolseley were real. There seems no reason to doubt, in the first place, the serious moral and political losses which would have resulted from a withdrawal behind the Tugela. But if these were to be faced it was imperative that they should as soon as possible be obliterated by success in the field; and it was further evident that the certain alternative to such success was fresh retirements and losses, possibly disaster. All the conditions of a victory south of the Tugela in the last weeks of October or the first fortnight of November were absent. Numbers, mobility, momentum, and *morale*—even supposing that Sir George White had retreated as soon as the Glencoe force had joined him, had, that is, postponed a decisive battle—were all on the side of the enemy. Assuming with Lord Wolseley that the ordnance stores and ammunition could have been brought away, provisions would still have been a difficulty; and that at a moment when full rations were a matter of more than usual importance. On November 2nd, exclusive of the supplies which would have been abandoned or destroyed in Ladysmith,[2] there were only nine days' provisions and

[1] Wolseley, 8903–6–10.

[2] Lord Roberts (10183) goes so far as to say that White was forced to stay there in order to prevent the stores falling into the enemy's hands. General Hunter (14488) takes the same view. White, Ardagh, Altham, Ward, and Ian Hamilton, all agree that there would not have been time to remove the stores after the Boer advance had commenced. There is no question that their loss would have seriously hampered operations south of the Tugela, and rendered anything like an

forage collected on the railway between Colenso and Maritzburg; of these six days' supply were at the latter place, one at Estcourt and two at Colenso.[1] Even admitting that large stores could have been collected in Southern Natal, the richest of all our South African colonies, and more sent round from the Cape, the supply service would hardly have been working with the speed and regularity which troops taking part in arduous operations imperatively require. Another most serious want would have been that of transport. Sir George White was only able to move three days' distance from a railway, and had the enemy, as was extremely probable, attempted wide flanking operations, it would have been difficult to counteract them. Sir Ian Hamilton's views as to the practicability of widely extended operations south of the Tugela are worth quoting. He holds that a withdrawal from Ladysmith without previous preparation would have been "most disastrous." Proper lateral communications along the south bank would have been specially necessary, since to hold the river line would have required a very wide front and special means of reinforcing the threatened points and feeding the troops. "It is very bad, hilly country indeed. If we had taken up such a position, either our line would have been pierced at some point or it would have been turned. . . . I do not believe that we could have prevented the Boers crossing the Tugela and turning our right flank."[2] Last, but not least, the want of water, a difficulty which Sir Redvers Buller was obliged to meet by supplies carried by rail, would have severely handicapped the British infantry.[3]

A great writer has asked, "What would become of the whole theory of military science were its great views and measures buried under a hill of small difficulties, which have been with difficulty collected from the whole range of possibility?" We submit that such difficulties and disadvantages as we have enumerated were not small or imaginary, and the sole means of overcoming them, if they were superable at all, the energy, resource, and personal influence of a great leader was wanting. If, as is reasonable to suppose, the Boers had acted with anything approaching the vigour they had shown on Mournful Monday, it is difficult to see how White's force would have escaped from investment and starvation, except by a retreat which would have further demoralised the troops and the supporters of the British cause, and left most or all of Southern Natal at the mercy of the enemy. Of course, had the Boer army failed to pursue, then these objections to the scheme of retirement in part fall to

investment fatal, but it is not clear that this consideration alone would have justified White in remaining at Ladysmith.

[1] G. O. C. lines of communication in Natal to Secretary of State, November 2, 1899.

[2] Ian Hamilton (13856–66). At the end of January the War Office asked whether there was any position in Natal which could be made virtually impregnable by a force of 10,000 men, and suggested the line of the Tugela. Buller replied that 16,000 men and a strong force of artillery was a minimum. This opinion lends colour to our contention in Chapter I., namely, that the only way of defending Natal behind the Tugela lay not in the mere occupation of defensive positions but in a vigorous offensive. That under the circumstances of November, 1899, this would have been possible we do not believe.

[3] Hunter (14523–6) objected to the defensive position behind the Tugela for the reason that while the force would have been obliged to keep near the river on account of the water supply, it would have been overlooked by the enemy on the higher northern bank.

the ground. But would Sir George White have been justified in assuming inactivity on their part? Would it not have been the height of rashness to do so on the evening of October 30th? Had the enemy advanced a purely defensive attitude behind the Tugela could not have succeeded. The only means of avoiding the necessity of a further retirement would have lain in a successful counter offensive; and of that the chances were slight. Historical parallels are, as everybody knows, dangerous things, but we cannot help comparing White's position with that of Bonaparte after the reverse of Caldiero in 1796. Had White fallen back across the Tugela, as the great captain did over the Adige, would he have been able to find a field of battle as favourable to his arms as that which Bonaparte found on the dykes of Ronco? Yet even for the army of Italy and its leader, superior as they were in mobility, tactics, and resolution to their opponents, Arcola was a desperate measure. Would not a renewed offensive in Natal have entailed still greater risks?

APPENDIX B

NOTES ON THE DEFENCE OF LADYSMITH

A *Section.*

KNOX'S section was the one most dominated by fire. The models of his entrenchments were the Turkish works at Plewna. "He with two or three others after the siege of Plewna visited the place, and to that visit we are indebted for the very fine way his defence was first of all entrenched. . . . He built up enormous stone traverses, capable of resisting any shell fire we have ever seen yet, and it was only from disregard or carelessness in not obeying his orders that any casualty did occur in his defence, and there were some very bad ones." [1] Sir Archibald Hunter reckoned the whole of the perimeter at 28 miles, including zig-zags.

The Retention of the Cavalry.

It would appear that at one time Sir George White contemplated sending part of his cavalry out of Ladysmith. To a request from Buller on October 31st that a battalion and a cavalry regiment should be sent to cover Maritzburg from a raid on the north-east, and a suggestion that some of the mounted troops would be more useful on the south bank of the Tugela, he replied on November 1st that he did not think that the cavalry could get through without heavy loss, but that if the roads were clear he would send one regiment. As regards the demand for infantry he said, "Do not ask me to detach another battalion. The enemy are in great force." It will be remembered that the day before the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the Natal Field Battery had been sent to Colenso. The avowed object of this militarily

[1] Hunter's Evidence. Question 14540.

inadequate measure was to give confidence to Maritzburg, and to afford some protection to the Colony;[1] but Lord Wolseley's message of October 23rd expressing anxiety about the safety of Colenso Bridge evidently had a part in the prompting of it. It seems that this message was wrongly interpreted by White, for it had reference to a time when his army was still able to operate in the field, and when the Commander-in-Chief expected that in the case of failure he would retire across the Tugela by the Colenso Bridge. To attempt to hold the passage with a single battalion and six antiquated guns when he was no longer able to reinforce them, and when the bridge had ceased to be useful to him as a means of retreat, was without use or object.

APPENDIX C

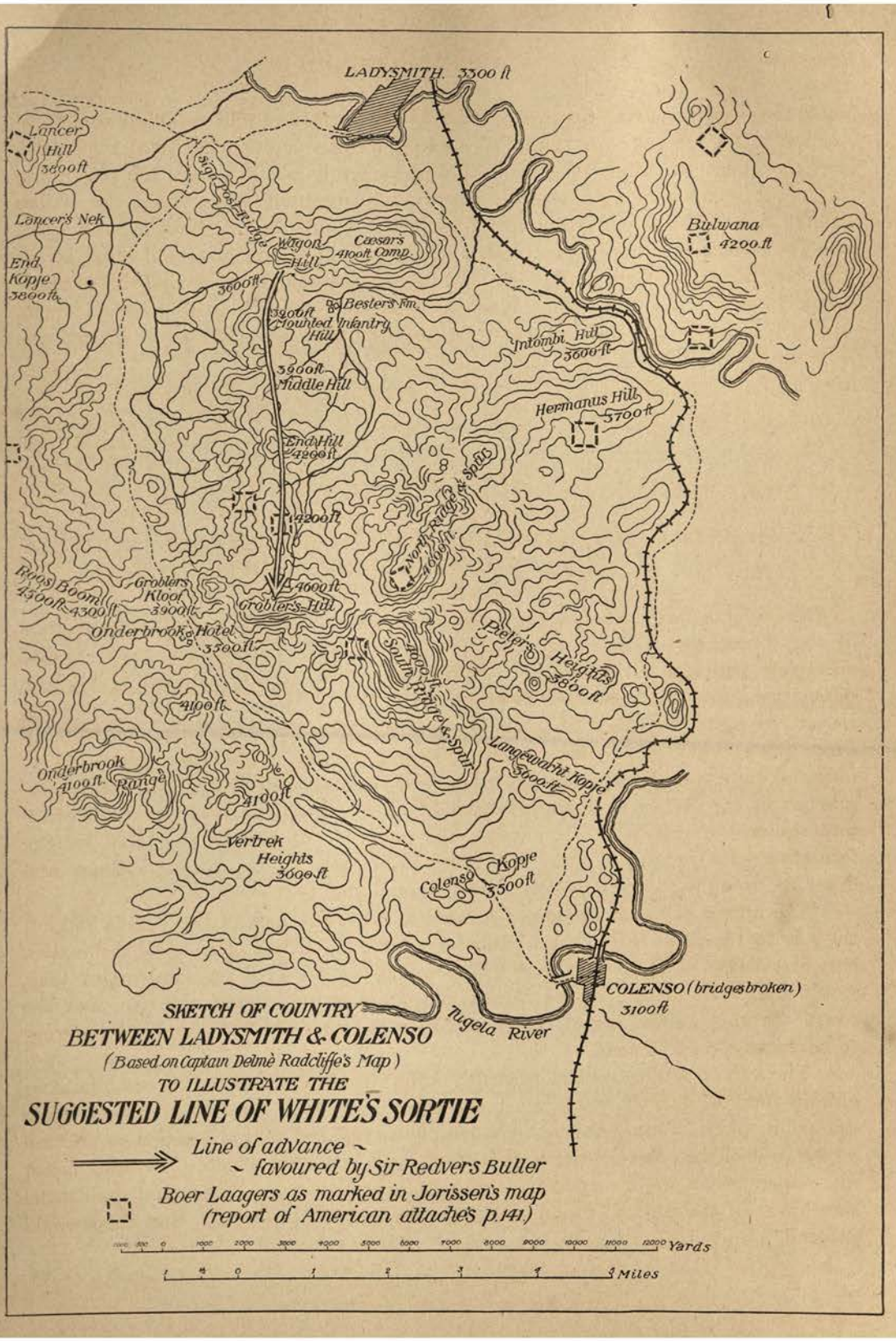
THE QUESTION OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN SIR REDVERS BULLER AND SIR GEORGE WHITE

IN the evidence he gave before the Royal Commission Sir Redvers Buller complained of the supineness of Sir George White's defence and of his failure to co-operate effectively with the relief column. To this he attributed a great part of his own difficulties; and his views on the relation of White's force to his own, and the respective parts they were to play in operating their junction, differ considerably from those which a distant observer of the events would have been led to form. White, on the other hand, expressed equal dissatisfaction with the commander of the Relief Column. As the whole question is one of great historical importance, we propose to summarise the materials at present available for the formation of a judgment upon it, relying principally on the correspondence and opinions brought to light by the Royal Commission.

The retreat of the Boers under Joubert to the north bank of the Tugela had left the way to the river open to the Relief Column, and it was obvious by the end of the first week in December that its operations, whatever form they might take, would find their theatre in the narrow zone of country between the river and the town. In this we include of course the river passages which the enemy's covering force might elect to defend.

The aim of White and Buller was to unite. Both realised that the simultaneous employment of their forces against the inner and outer lines of the Boer army offered, in point of time, the best chance of success, and that a junction so effected would in itself be equivalent to a decisive victory. In point of place, the other factor in co-operation, it was clear that the more their attacks could be directed against the same part of the enemy's positions the greater was the probability that they would succeed.

[1] White to Governor of Natal October 30th.



SKETCH OF COUNTRY
BETWEEN LADYSMITH & COLENSO
(Based on Captain Delmè Radcliffe's Map)
TO ILLUSTRATE THE
SUGGESTED LINE OF WHITE'S SORTIE

Line of advance ~
~ favoured by Sir Redvers Buller

Boer Laagers as marked in Jorissen's map
(report of American attache's p.141)

The initiative rested with the commander of the Relief Column, and the first question he had to decide was whether, in view of the difficult country to the northward and the distance of the Tugela from the town, it would not be better to seize the river passages before calling upon the garrison to act. This, as we know, was the opinion held by Sir Redvers Buller, and in spite of some evidence to the contrary[1] it seems to have been that of Sir George White as well. At any rate, it is tolerably certain that the latter did not contemplate decisive action until the Relief Column was in a position to attack the enemy's main body on the hills behind the stream, which were nearer to Ladysmith and were throughout the key of the situation. We think, therefore, that we are justified in concluding that both officers were in accord as to the necessity of a preliminary lodgment of the Relief Column on the north bank.

But as to the actual method of attack, the proportion of strength to be employed by each, and the comparative risks that each force was to run, they differed. Buller, who said in his evidence: "White had a better force theoretically, a more experienced force, and a larger available force to help himself with than I had to help him,"[2] and who placed no value upon the town of Ladysmith or the heavier baggage, even including the guns, of the garrison as compared with the advantage of releasing the troops for field operations,[3] intended that White with his entire force should abandon the town and fight his way along the ridge which ran southward from Waggon Hill to Grobler's Hill while he himself attacked towards the same point from Colenso. "I am satisfied in my own mind," he said, "that if I had been in Ladysmith with that force[4] I could have come out any morning or evening that I wished to from Waggon Hill and along the line of the watershed; there is a very interesting watershed there. . . . From Waggon Hill it comes round,

[1] Thus on November 26th Sir George White says: "When you are ready to cross Tugela I propose to create diversion by fighting towards Onderbrook Hotel, and we should attack on same date. . . . May I reckon on 12th or 13th from Colenso, or other point of Tugela?" . . . (to Clery No. 18P, see Minutes of Evidence 14866). In his message to Buller of December 10th, No. 27P, he asks: ". . . Am I right in supposing that you will force crossing of Potgieter's Drift morning of 15th? If so, I will move out night 14th–15th and work towards you as far as I can. As time is all important factor in co-operation you will, I am sure, inform me of any change." But in his message No. 33P, 18th December, sent after the arrival of Buller's Colenso telegram (No. 88 quoted in text, p. 56), he asks: "I had made preparations to fight towards Onderbrook and could do so still *if you had Colenso*." (The italics are our own.) "Colenso" here clearly means the command of the passage. In the despatches of November 26th and December 10th he seems to proffer assistance at the moment of the crossing itself. On the whole, however, it would appear that Sir George White did not anticipate—any more than Sir Redvers seems to have done—much difficulty in the achievement of this preliminary task, and was thinking more of the enemy's resistance in the great hill positions two or three miles behind the river.

[2] Question 15356. We cannot subscribe to this opinion.

[3] Question 15358–15366. Sir Redvers develops his views on this question, and points out very truly that the junction of White and himself would far outweigh any disadvantage which might result from the temporary abandonment of Ladysmith.

[4] About the time of Colenso Buller reckoned White's force at 12,000. Probably there were not available more than 9,000 sabres and bayonets with 50 guns (including 3 lb. Nordenfelts) of various calibres and models.

you turn at the end of Bester's Spruit and come on to the next high hill and then you go down a little at the top of Onderbrook and come out at Grobler's on the top of the hill, so the whole way out of Ladysmith he [White] would have had strong artillery positions to take up and help his attack as he came along. There could have been no difficulty whatever in getting out of Ladysmith provided he could be received at the bottom of the hill where I hoped to be able to receive him.[1] . . . I thought myself he could have formed his troops in that large sort of pan after you come through Ladysmith beside Middle Hill, just at the extreme west end of Waggon Hill. He would then have been on the Nek, and then if he had kept round he would have been out of shot practically from Lancer's Kop, and I think it would have been a very long range from Bulwana. And he had two naval guns against the one on Bulwana, and could, as he did afterwards, have put one on the top of Cæsar's Camp."[2] The sick, wounded and non-combatants, General Buller thought would have been safe at Intombi. If White had joined him they could have defeated the Boers the next day, and with the hills in British hands the enemy could never have entered Ladysmith. Buller's plan, then, amounted to this, that as soon as he had effected his lodgment on the north bank, and while the covering army of Boers were still undefeated White was to abandon everything but the food and ammunition necessary to supply the force for three or four days, let go of his lines of defence, with the single exception perhaps of Cæsar's Camp (which, being a good artillery position, would help to cover his fighting line from attacks on the flank and rear, and might possibly prevent the enemy from entering Ladysmith) and throw himself with every horse, man and gun he could muster first upon the investing lines of the enemy and then upon the rear of the covering force on Grobler's Hill, which position the Relief Column would at the same time attack in front. In order to succeed he would have to push through about five miles of broken country[3] and on a front sufficiently broad to prevent flanking fire from interfering with the main attack.

From White's point of view, as the commander of a besieged town, the plan of abandoning Ladysmith, if it was ever pressed upon him by his subordinates, may well have appeared unnecessarily hazardous. In the first place, it is impossible to deny the great initial disadvantage which is suffered, so far as offensive operations are concerned, by a force that has been shut in by the enemy. During modern times—and every improvement of weapons has told in favour of the besieging army—we cannot

[1] Question 15356. [2] Question 15357.

[3] In his statement (vol. ii. p. 174) Sir Redvers Buller said: "When once he (White) started his only care would be to force his way to the river 16 miles downhill." From Captain Delme Radcliffe's map and the Boer map of Ladysmith reproduced in the volume containing the American attaché's reports we are unable to recognise the accuracy of this description. The whole difficulty of the situation lay in the fact that between Ladysmith and the Tugela stretched a rugged hill-mass which could only be forced by capturing its commanding features. The proposed march would have begun near the foot of Waggon Hill at an altitude of about 3,600 feet; the summit of Grobler's Hill, about halfway between that point and the Tugela, was 800 feet higher. Its spurs and the heights to its west and east, formed a huge semicircle round the lower ridge of the watershed, which as it ascended towards the central mass offered several positions to a capable defender.

recall an instance of an investment being terminated by the breaking of the cordon from inside. The arrival of the Relief Column on the Tugela only altered White's situation just in so far as it occupied the attention of the Boer forces at the moment of the garrison's sortie, and until he could be sure that a real effect had been produced on the covering army, he would naturally elect to keep a safe hold of his main means of subsistence and defence, the town and its stores, while extending to Buller as strong a helping hand as the fulfilment of this condition allowed. As a matter of fact, the only two occasions on which he seems to have given the idea of abandoning Ladysmith a moment's thought were after that the reverses of Colenso and Spion Kop had temporarily or, as at the time he may have thought, finally, destroyed the chances of effective co-operation, and when the urgency of the crisis seemed to warrant the adoption of desperate measures. But before those battles he always assumed as the basis of his plan of co-operation a firm retaining hold on Ladysmith, and discarded its wholesale abandonment as needless and perilous. That he should have held such an opinion is not surprising. With Mournful Monday fresh in his memory, he was naturally unwilling to risk his whole force in another general engagement in which the encircling positions held by the enemy and their superior mobility seemed likely to give them advantages similar in kind but greatly accentuated in degree; at the very moment when 16,000 [1] troops under one of the most experienced of English soldiers had arrived on the Tugela, after driving back with ease the invaders of Southern Natal, and when its commander's messages, as White pointed out on December 18th, suggested a confident anticipation of success.[2]

Of course, just as Sir Redvers's offensive power was limited by his anxiety for Southern Natal, [3] the retention of Ladysmith limited Sir George White's power for co-operation. And the knowledge that such a refuge was behind him removed perhaps the main advantage which the adoption of Buller's scheme would have afforded, namely, the consciousness that he had no alternative but to succeed. Ladysmith once left behind and open to the enemy, the motive of self-preservation guaranteed an extreme vigour of action on the part of Sir George and his subordinates. But while, on the one hand, as history has often shown, the greatest energy, and the most absolute disregard for loss, may not of themselves secure success, there is no reason on the other to underrate the value of the assistance which White on his own motion was ready to render to Buller. As his disposition of December 14th shows, he was fully prepared to throw something between 5,000 and 6,000 men with

[1] At the time of Colenso. The possibility of a night attack on the enemy's lines, by which we mean not an attack at dawn but an actual assault in the dark like that on Gun Hill, seems to have been discussed. There is no doubt that if the attempts at relief had finally failed some such effort would have been made to save Sir George White and the more mobile and vigorous of his troops. But the results of such an operation would have been too liable to mishap and panic for it to be attempted by a force so large as the whole garrison; and towards the end of the siege most of the men were incapable of marching so far. It would have been tried more by way of escape than of assault.

[2] 33 P. 18th December.

[3] "He felt that it was his first duty to keep Southern Natal clear of the enemy, and that consequently he must keep at least 10,000 men, or one half of the force at his disposal in Natal, in a fit state to defend the Colony." (Vol. II. p. 174.)

thirty-two guns against the lines of the investment. The Flying Column included three-fourths of his mounted troops, more than half of his infantry, and five-sixths of his mobile artillery ; and its advance would have been covered by the fire of some of the naval guns. Carrying ample ammunition and four days' supply, they were in a position to take part in a prolonged action. Such a body of troops resolutely handled at the moment when the enemy were heavily pressed by Buller, would have produced as great a moral effect as the advance of the entire garrison. During the opening days of the Spion Kop operations, for instance, it is more than probable that a general panic would have resulted from their entry upon the scene of action. And this result would have been attained without the danger of committing the entire garrison to an operation in which success was the only alternative to disaster, while Sir Redvers Buller's own action in front was still undecided. As far as the garrison was concerned, everything depended on whether the commandos facing the Tugela had been shaken by the attack of the Relief Column. Without the receipt of a definite order from its commander, who was in a position to judge his own chances of success and the proper moment for White to co-operate, the latter was bound to confine himself to a sortie such as was contemplated by the order of December 14th, and would not have been justified in abandoning the town with his whole force. Such an order we learn that Sir Redvers would have sent,[1] placing General Hunter in command, had he succeeded in effecting a lodgment at Colenso.

When at last in the middle of February he was able to occupy the north bank of the Tugela at Colenso, the garrison was incapable of action, and as a consequence the watershed scheme was never tried. Nevertheless, we have thought it useful to develop the foregoing considerations, because they furnish data which assist us in determining how far co-operative action on the part of the garrison was possible, and bring out the difference of the standpoints from which Generals Buller and White envisaged that all-important question. We cannot help feeling that from the first the former under-estimated the difficulties which are inherent in the situation of a besieged garrison, and proportionately over-estimated the assistance that its commander was in a position to afford.

Sir Redvers's criticism is not specially directed against any particular period or incident nor, in view of the fact that at Colenso he did not intend Sir George White to act until he himself had gained possession of the north bank, can it be supposed that he had any ground for complaint against his inaction on December 15th. As the case at present stands, his censure seems to be aimed more at Sir George White's general attitude ; a conclusion rendered the more probable by the fact that his criticisms take the form of a reply to Sir George's evidence, and are intended as an explanation of the reasons that led him to conclude that the Ladysmith garrison would give him little or no help. It remains to be seen how far they were well-founded.

The first despatch which throws light on this point is that of October 31st, which reached Buller just as he landed at Cape Town. In it White described his position ; and explained the impossibility of a withdrawal, and his hopes of retaining

[1] Evidence. Vol. II. p. 174.

the enemy round the town. The next, of November 1st, bore witness to the gradual tightening of the lines of investment by the words, "the cavalry could not get away without heavy loss." By the time that the next message had reached the headquarters at Cape Town Buller had seen French, and had gathered from conversations with him that White had been driven into Ladysmith, and was powerless to defend Southern Natal. He had already made up his mind that the operations in the Free State would have to be deferred, and that he himself would have to repair to Natal in order to save it from further invasion, and, if possible, to relieve the town.

White's message of November 10th, while it mentioned the difficulty of concentrating for counter attacks in so extended a perimeter, contained his first offer of co-operation; "Clery should advance to Colenso as early as possible, and I will help to open road for him *viâ* Onderbrook on learning his dates." Then followed an undated despatch[1] to Clery, urging a concentration of all available troops on the Tugela to occupy the enemy's attention, and advising that no advance to the relief of the town should be made except with a very strong column; "I cannot go far to meet you." Counting on relief at an early date, he undertook to feed three extra brigades and his own force for a month. His next message of November 24th referred mainly to the enemy's movements, and to the increasing effect of the bombardment. On November 26th he gave details of his stores, all of which, except those of hay and gun ammunition, were ample, and proposed "to create diversion by fighting towards Onderbrook Hotel" when Clery was ready to cross the Tugela. "Enemy has entrenched positions commanding this route, and we should attack on same date." Finally he asked for the details of Clery's force.

Presumably this despatch was forwarded by Clery to Buller about the time the latter reached Natal. On November 29th the Commander-in-Chief announced to White the retirement of the Boers across the Tugela, and the formation of the Relief Column, and added, "If you hear me attacking, join in if you can. I do not yet know which way I will come. How much longer could you hold out?" In his well-known reply of November 30th White gave minute details of his means of resistance, which included "provisions for seventy days" and "thirty-five days' supply" of hay "at reduced rations." He went on to complain of the difficulty of keeping his intentions secret: "Enemy learns every plan of operations I form, and I cannot discover source." In spite of precautionary measures he still had "undoubted evidence of betrayal." With regard to the line of advance of the Relief Column he said: "I could give most help to force coming *viâ* Onderbrook or Springfield, but enemy is making his positions on that side stronger daily. If force south of Tugela can effect junction with me, I believe effect will be immediate and decisive. At present cannot go large as I am completely invested, and must reserve myself for one or two big efforts to co-operate with relief force. It will be the greatest help to Ladysmith if relief force maintains closest possible touch with enemy. . . . I will keep a good look out, and do all I can."

Thus three times within three weeks, and more on his own initiative than any one else's, White repeated the offer to co-operate. But the qualifying words

[1] 14838. White's statement.

"I cannot go far to meet you," and "diversion" combined with his already formed opinion, carried more weight with Sir Redvers Buller than the offers themselves. This impression was only deepened by the despatch of November 30th. He interpreted it to mean "that White was unable to take the field, and could make no plans"; an inference which in view of the distinction that the latter was careful to draw between the impracticability of extensive operations while the Relief Column was still dispersed south of the Tugela, and his readiness to make "one or two big efforts" when its advance rendered co-operation possible, appears, to say the least, premature. On the ground that the roads by Onderbrook and Springfield both met in the same Onderbrook Flat Sir Redvers further concluded that by the words, "*I could give most help to force coming viâ* Onderbrook or Springfield," White restricted him to one route, and that the Relief Column could expect no help from the garrison until it reached that point, about two miles from the town.[1] Once more, in view of the projects for seizing Lancer's Kop which were considered in Ladysmith about this time, in view of the facts that White, from the wording of his message, plainly intended each name to signify an alternative route, and that, by expressing a preference for these, he did not exclude other routes of approach,[2] we think that his superior misinterpreted his meaning. Finally, the sentences referring to the spy question convinced Sir Redvers that there must be some leakage in Sir George White's office, and that it would be unsafe to concert a plan of operations with him. Granting that the phrase "plan of operations," as used in White's despatch, was misleading in so far as it suggested that the Boers had a knowledge of paper schemes drawn up by head-quarters, and that Sir Redvers might thence have been led to infer that the contents of cipher messages were also in danger of betrayal, there is no question that the conclusion he arrived at reflected very gravely on the competence of the Staff of the garrison, and if true would enormously affect the value of Sir George White's co-operation. As a matter of fact the latter's frequent demands for details, dates, lines of route, etc.,[3] show that General Buller's conclusion was wrong. It is clear that White, who probably exaggerated the importance of Boer agents, was referring, not to any leakage in his office, but to the presence of spies in the town of Ladysmith.

The effect of the despatch as a whole was most unfortunate. Interpreting all

[1] As a matter of fact the Onderbrook route suggested by White seems to have been much the same as the "Watershed" line recommended by Buller. The difference between the standpoints from which either General regarded the question has been explained above.

[2] 14867. White, on being asked if this suggestion as to route was the only one, he made reply: "Yes, I think it is. . . . I did not suggest to him which way; Sir Redvers is not altogether a man to interfere with, and I did not like laying down the way he was to come, but I felt myself justified in saying which way I thought I could render most help." However, on November 17th, Colonel Altham, as head of the Intelligence Department in Natal, had suggested a reconnaissance of Potgieter's. By "Springfield" we conclude that White meant the Potgieter's route, which, before it entered the Onderbrook Flat, crossed Lancer's Nek.

[3] See messages of November 26th, December 10th, No. 30 P. December 13th, No. 33 P. December 18th and January 1st.

these doubtful points to White's disadvantage, Sir Redvers Buller assumed henceforth that his subordinate could give only very limited help in one inconvenient direction, and that to communicate details was to betray himself to the enemy. He did indeed make one effort to ascertain whether he understood White's views aright. This took the not very effective form of repeating on December 7th his message of the 29th November,[1] to which White's message of the 30th had been a reply.[2] In his statement before the Commission Sir George made no mention of having received the duplicate; at any rate the only result was to elicit a simple acknowledgment. Sir Redvers saw in this a confirmation of his own conclusions; and a fatal misunderstanding was established, never to be removed. "The whole of my correspondence and the whole of my arrangements with Sir George White were affected by my knowledge of this telegram,[3] and in consequence of it I probably took him less into my confidence than I did any other general who served under me during the time I was in South Africa."

On December 4th General Buller announced that the Relief Force was collected and that he would attack: that he had not yet decided upon any route, but that he would communicate with White in several cipher messages before he advanced. On the 7th he informed White that he had chosen Potgieter's Drift as his crossing place; that he expected to start on the 12th, and would take five days. On the 8th Sir George White reported the successful night sortie against Gun Hill, and informed him of a laager of 300 tents at Potgieter's. On the 10th he replied to Buller's message of the 7th[4] as follows:—

No. 27 P., December 10th. Your No. 65 of December 7th received and understood. Am I right in supposing that you will force crossing of Potgieter's Drift morning of 15th? If so, I will move out night 14th-15th, and work towards you as far as I can. As time is all-important factor in co-operation, you will, I am sure, inform me of any change.

On December 11th Buller replied, giving the dates on which he hoped to complete the various stages of his advance, but, as the time of starting depended on the arrival of the impressed transport, and this was uncertain, he added: "I think you had better not look forward to helping me before my attack on Lancer's Hill, unless you feel certain where I am." The fulfilment of this last condition depended on the sound of guns or on heliographic messages, the last-named means of communication being of course far the most reliable of the two. White, therefore, answered on the same day that he would look out for a heliograph on the hills south of Potgieter's, and act according to circumstances. Two days later, General Buller announced that he had changed his plans, and that he was coming by Colenso

[1] See p. 3.

[2] See 15150. General Buller had already acknowledged the receipt of White's message of November 30th in his own No. 58 of December 4th.

[3] *I.e.*, White's message of November 30th. See Question 15148.

[4] Messages sent by Buller to White seem often to have taken about two days to reach their destination. The ordinary line of communication with Ladysmith was from headquarters by wire to Estcourt, and thence to Umkalumba, where there was a signalling station within view of the town.

and Onderbrook. On White's asking for dates, he said that the "actual date of attack" would depend on the difficulties met with, but would probably be the 17th of December. Nothing more was heard of the Relief Column; but on the 14th White issued orders for the formation of the Flying Column, to be commanded by himself, Ladysmith being left to the care of Colonel Knox. On the afternoon of the 15th the cannonade, which had been audible for several days, and was believed by every one in Ladysmith to be the preliminary bombardment, ceased abruptly and next day arrived the message[1] announcing the reverse of Colenso.

The No. 88 heliogram[2] was intended to frighten White out of his supposed inaction, and to cause him "to form plans for assisting in his own relief, which, heretofore, he had declared to be impossible."[3] To Sir George White its purport appeared so strange that his reply[4] was primarily sent to ascertain whether it was a genuine message from Sir Redvers, or whether the cipher had fallen into the hands of the enemy. But it did not alter his plan of action. Throughout his views of the way in which his relief was to be executed were based on the idea of co-operation. The words, "I fear I could not cut my way to you"[5] seems plainly to refer to isolated action, a method which he regarded throughout as too desperate to be tried until everything else had failed. Before the Royal Commission he said: "I was quite ready and only too willing to get the chance of attacking, but it was no use without co-operation at the other end, and that co-operation required to be very carefully timed."[6] Even his proposal after Spion Kop that he should try to break out was based on the assumption that Buller would draw off the enemy's attention first by attacking him in front. We cannot, therefore, adopt Sir Redvers's view that the "Surrender" telegram of the 16th in any way stimulated White's initiative; and regarded as White regarded it, it certainly could not have increased his confidence in its author.

Considering how constant had been General White's demands for information as to General Buller's route of advance, the frequency with which he had undertaken to co-operate, his offer to leave Ladysmith on the evening of the 14th in order to aid a crossing at Potgieter's Drift, two marches distant, on the following morning, it is at first very difficult to perceive on what grounds the complaints of his superior are based. But it must be remembered that at the time these messages did not arrive together; that they were interspersed with a large quantity of miscellaneous information, some of it probably pointing to the unaggressiveness of Sir George's defence; and that therefore they did not appeal to Sir Redvers with the cumulative

[1] No. 88. See text, p. 56.

[2] General Buller's reason for sending the "surrender" telegram, as stated before the Commission, is of course different to that which he gave in the speech that led to his removal from the command of the 1st Army Corps. According to this utterance the sentence was "spatchcocked" into the message in order that its author might share with White the responsibility of surrender should the latter find himself face to face with so dire a necessity before the Relief Column could again attack. (See "Times History," vol. ii. pp. 461–62.)

[3] General Buller's Evidence, vol. ii. p. 175. Events of the 16th to 18th December.

[4] No. 32. 16th December quoted in the text, p. 57.

[5] Message of 16th December, see text, p. 57.

[6] Question 14892.

force and precision that they gain when presented to the ordinary reader in a Blue-book. Moreover, phrases such as "I cannot go far to meet him," "diversion," "as far as I can" did not of themselves give definite assurance of vigorous co-operation. Everything depended on the spirit in which they were read; and Sir Redvers considered that he had good grounds for interpreting them in a thoroughly pessimistic sense. It is abundantly clear that almost from the moment that he reached Capetown he had formed a low estimate of Sir George White's capacity. He had arrived to find his own plan of campaign wrecked by the failure in Natal; and from conversations with General French, and other information at his disposal, it is probable that he concluded that the officer commanding there was chiefly to blame. It was impossible that he should remain altogether uninfluenced by what he saw and heard. He proceeded to Durban, and in White's messages to Clery saw further evidence of the former's helplessness, a deduction which found expression in his message of November 29th: "If you hear me attacking, join in if you can." White's reply of November 30th he interpreted wholly to that general's disadvantage; and the impression made by it on his mind was never obliterated. He was quite ready to believe that the commander of Ladysmith would do all he could to help him, but it is obvious he regarded that "all" as a practical "nil." This want of confidence in his subordinate proved fatal to a satisfactory understanding. Had he from the first possessed a higher opinion of him, his interpretation of those messages would, we venture to think, have been different; in other words, the misunderstanding was due more to his preconceived opinion than to ambiguities in the documents themselves.

But if Sir Redvers Buller really estimated Sir George White's initiative so low and the value of his army so high, as to consider the first named fit for supersession, and the last named as at least as important a fighting asset as his own force, it might reasonably be expected that from the first he would have insisted on its energetic employment, or that at any rate he would have urged its commander to give his views in detail. The surprising thing is that he did nothing of the kind.

Convinced that White shrank from the risk of measures which would prove effective, and dreading that direct orders or positive demands might prompt him to steps of which in his heart he disapproved, Sir Redvers Buller never even asked him a definite question as to what he thought he could do, how and when he would do it, and what force he would be able to employ. It was White alone, who, by his frequent questions, showed anxiety to know the intentions of the commander of the Relief Column, and thus gave proof of his readiness to co-operate. We do not know how most soldiers would regard General Buller's principle of never asking a subordinate to do what he did not feel able to perform. It does not seem to have been that adopted by the great leaders of the past; and, if persisted in, would, we should have thought, have ended in depriving the supreme commander of one of his most important attributes, the power of insisting that no minor difficulty should interfere with the success of the main enterprise. It is, perhaps, more pertinent to note that General Buller's attitude practically excused his subordinate from co-operating at all. So marked is this apparent indifference as to the assistance that the garrison

could give, that, were it not for his statement to the contrary, we should be tempted to conclude that at the time of Colenso Sir Redvers had not realised —as, indeed, few men, whether inside or outside of Ladysmith, had realised—the difficulties of his task; that he hoped to succeed without White's help; and that it was only after the reverse that the value of his co-operation forced itself in its full significance upon him, and that he endeavoured to arouse the commander of the garrison from the state of paralysis in which he believed him to be.

The three weeks following the defeat were taken up with discussions as to the general situation and Buller's new plan of advance by Potgieter's. On December 17th[1] he wrote that he could only keep a small force near Colenso owing to difficulties of water supply; that in about three weeks he hoped to take Colenso, but that he could never get to Onderbrook; could White make any suggestions?[2] The latter replied that it was difficult to make suggestions as he did not know Buller's situation. He could still fight towards Onderbrook if the Relief Column could seize Colenso. He could not advocate leaving a small force in advance of the main body as it would be liable to investment. He advised holding the front line in strength, and attacking again with all available reinforcements as early as possible.[3] "Meanwhile I will do all I can to maintain an active defence, and will co-operate with you to the extent of my power if you advance again." On the same day he stated in reply to Buller's announcement of reinforcements and of his intention to try the Potgieter's route,[4] that he had provisions for six weeks, and was confident of holding out for that period in spite of disease and bombardment. He could get on well for three weeks, keeping even horses moderately fit," if Buller wished to wait for his heavy artillery, on the importance of which he [White] laid great stress. He ended by suggesting special arrangements to ensure a water supply near the Tugela.[5]

Twelve days passed without any communication of particular importance passing, but on December 30th Buller wrote that he hoped to start on January 6th, that Lancer's Kop would be his point of attack, and that he expected to take about six days in reaching it.[6] On New Year's Day White replied that if Buller would trust him with the further details of his plan, he hoped to be able to assist him in the later stages of his advance; but to do this effectually he would require to know on which line or lines he intended to force the passage of the Tugela.[7] Buller answered that he adhered to the plan of crossing at Potgieter's, as given in his despatch of the 17th, that he expected to have to fight three distinct actions, one for the river-passage, one behind it, and one at Lancer's Kop, and asked whether White could suggest a better point for the final assault. Owing to the non-arrival of the reinforcements he would probably be unable to start before January 8th; and he expected to take seven days.[8] White agreed to co-operate with him in the attack on Lancer's Kop, which he regarded as an essential point on the intended line of advance. If the recently arrived troops required rest there was no need of hurry on the garrison's account. "I am quite confident of holding my own here."[9]

[1] No. 93. [2] No. 33 P. December 18th.
[3] In his No. 98 of December 18th Buller announced that he was shelling Colenso.
[4] No. 97 December 17th. [5] No. 34. P. December 18th. [6] No. 131.
[7] 38. P. January 1st. [8] No. 133. January 2nd. [9] No. 39 P. January 2nd.

Thus far, although the limitation of his sphere of action to an attack on Lancer's Kop indicates a decrease in White's strength and confidence—a diminution presumably due to the increasing effects of disease and want on the garrison, the failing condition of the horses, the effect of the disappointment of Colenso, and his own ill-health—he still held out definite hopes of co-operation. The results of the attack on Ladysmith brought about a startling change in his views. Badly beaten as the enemy was, his bold assault had told heavily upon the victors. The day after the fight [1] their commander reported :—"Troops here much played out, and a very large proportion of my officers have, up to date, been killed or wounded or are sick. I would rather not call upon them to move out from Ladysmith to co-operate with you." From this date, says General Buller, "I entertained no further hope of assistance from the Ladysmith garrison."

Nor was he wrong. During the last half of the siege, although on January 16th White offered to make a demonstration at the moment of Buller's final attack and, when on February 8th the latter announced that he had decided to adopt the Hlangwane route, undertook to give help at Bulwana, the Relief Column had to struggle on unassisted, with the added disadvantage that as the garrison grew weaker, more Boers moved across from the lines of investment to oppose him on the Tugela.[2]

Taking the facts as they stand it is hardly necessary to point out the fatal effects of the battle of Colenso. It was in every sense the turning-point of the campaign. In the month that intervened between it and the renewal of the British attack the offensive powers of the garrison, already partially dissipated by increasing privation, had been crippled by a desperate attack. The loss was not neutralised by the reinforcements that reached the Relief Column. The chance of December never returned. From January 6th until the day of relief the vigour of the garrison declined in almost exact ratio as Buller's attack gathered strength. Had the Spion Kop or Vaalkranz operations taken place in December White's force would probably have turned the scale. By the middle of January it had ceased to be an active factor in the struggle. Never probably has Napoleon's maxim, that lost opportunities never return in war, received stronger confirmation ; all the more emphatic because, in spite of the severe struggles that took place on the Tugela and at Ladysmith, the strategical situation remained outwardly the same.

In the last half of the siege, unlike the earlier portion, opportunities of co-operation were numerous ; but the garrison were exhausted by battle, privation, and disease. On January 16th, the day before Warren crossed at Trichardt's Drift to begin the operations which ended in Spion Kop, White reported 2,400 men in

[1] No. 44 P. January 7th.

[2] On January 21st, Buller, in a message to White, estimates that there are 10,000 Boers on the Tugela, and 5,000 round Ladysmith, On January 28th he places them at 16,000 on the Tugela, and 4,000 round Ladysmith. On February 12th he doubted if White contained 2,000 ; a view which the latter described as a gross exaggeration. The other estimates he said he accepted at the time as he had no means of disproving them. The enemy's own accounts seem to corroborate the totals of the force round Ladysmith ; the Boers on the Tugela they estimate at much lower figures than those given by General Buller.

hospital, and a total loss of 230 officers killed, wounded, and non-effective since the beginning of the campaign.[1] On January 27th, the day on which he proposed to try to break out, he reckoned his force at 7,000 men, but those weak and morally played out. Afterwards he discovered that this was too high an estimate. In the last days of the siege, on February 22nd, he had to abandon a project of capturing the Bulwana gun because the officers told him that the men were too weak to crawl up the hill.[2] When after the relief he sent out a column to pursue the enemy only 100 to 120 men per battalion were fit for work, and the available horses were scarcely able to drag the guns.

Had a man of Masséna's fighting energy been in White's place it is possible that the paralysis which overcame the striking power of the garrison after January 6th would have been less complete and sudden; and to the flagging strength of the British general, worn with long anxiety and ill-health, must be ascribed in some degree its subsequent inaction. But it is difficult for any one who was not present in Ladysmith to realise how terrible was the ordeal of the great attack and how completely it expended the nervous endurance and energy of the garrison. The conditions were not favourable to its restoration. He would be a bold man who without actual experience of the situation would venture to challenge the terms of Sir George White's message of January 7th as exaggerated. Looking round on his long and thinly held perimeter, aware of the exhaustion of his men, and ignorant of the situation outside, he shrunk from a serious call on their energies.[3] General Buller, convinced by White's messages of the 7th and 16th that the garrison could not longer safely be called upon, could hardly ask it, and refused his last offer to attempt to break out as too desperate a chance. By the end of January most of the troops could not have marched ten miles, and they were as little able to carry out a series of small harassing operations, which earlier in the siege might have been employed with good results. The strength of a force cannot be measured only by the losses in action and hospital. It is rather in the physical and moral conditions of the average man that the true criterion of its power consists; and in Ladysmith the average man was weakened by long moral and physical depression. Such being the condition of the material with which he had to work we cannot wonder that, in default of a direct order or summons from General Buller, Sir George White declined during the last half of the siege to risk a large part of his troops in a sortie.

We have already remarked in the text that the conduct of the defence of Ladysmith was not marked by the continuous and restless energy which, for moral even more than for material reasons, should characterise the action of a besieged garrison. Had it been otherwise there is little doubt that the task of the Relief Column would have been appreciably lightened. And in discussing the justice of Sir Redvers Buller's strictures this must be taken into account, not merely with regard to the strictures themselves, but to the effect that the knowledge of the garrison's inactivity must have had on him at the time. But this lack of aggressiveness in the daily

[1] About 35 per cent. of the officers originally available. [2] 14912.

[3] On January 21st he offered to demonstrate at the moment of Buller's decisive attack.

conduct of the siege was of a nature different to that of the special efforts that White undertook to make in co-operation with Buller; and in this latter respect the available evidence does not justify the charges of supineness and timidity. Had an occasion arisen while his troops were still capable of exertion we see no reason to believe that Sir George would have disappointed his superior of what his words, fairly interpreted, would have entitled the latter to expect, or his actual preparations showed that he was ready to perform. It is possible that if before Colenso General Buller had been better acquainted with White's arrangements, he would have been more ready to trust his promises. Before the Commission he complained that Sir George had never communicated any details to him. On the other hand, as the messages show, the latter had to encounter a similar difficulty; and he might equally plead that he could not give definite undertakings, as a great deal would depend on the attitude of the enemy. All he could do was to promise his best. What that best amounted to was never shown; what General Buller at the moment thought that it amounted to is a different question.

It is of course impossible to say how far the relief might have been accelerated if from the first a good understanding had existed between the two Generals. But one thing at least is certain: the essence of co-operation is mutual confidence. If instead of Blücher, Gneisenau had been in command of the Prussian army at Wavre on the evening of June 17, 1815, Waterloo would not have proved an irretrievable disaster for Napoleon. The Prussian Chief of the Staff did not trust Wellington. It was not a matter of more ample information, for Gneisenau had seen the Duke's message, and knew all that Blücher knew. It was a question of confidence in the allied commander. In Natal this element was from the first entirely lacking on Buller's side; it can scarcely have existed after Colenso on the side of White. The situation at the beginning was difficult enough; it became hopeless, so far as united action was concerned, when mutual trust disappeared.

APPENDIX D.

I.—THE DEFENCE OF WAGGON HILL AND CÆSAR'S CAMP.

(January 6th.)

SINCE Chapter IV. was printed the following facts and considerations regarding the defences of Platrand on the morning of the great assault have been brought to our notice.

In the first six weeks of the siege Waggon Hill, which it will be remembered was separated by a nek from Cæsar's Camp, was not held by the British who regarded it as outside the perimeter of defence. For a time the Boers actually used to keep a small picket on its extreme point (Waggon Hill West). After

the cavalry operation of November 14th Sir George White decided to occupy it, but even then only as an outpost. Accordingly seventy to eighty Imperial Light Horsemen were sent there and placed under Colonel Hamilton's command. So stationed they were out of reach of rifle fire support from the main line. One small sangar was erected on the western slope of Waggon Hill overlooking the nek dividing Waggon Hill and Waggon Hill West; but after this had been built the Light Horsemen themselves requested that nothing more should be done in the way of fortification on the ground that to do so would draw shell fire from Middle Hill; that as Colonials, if the enemy did attack, they could play the Boer game and snap-shoot from behind the rocks; and that they did not require the head-cover which regular infantry, who take some time to aim, needed in order to place them on an equality with such quick short-range marksmen as the Boers. It was thought desirable to humour a Colonial Corps; all the more so, probably, because at the time Waggon Hill West was evidently not regarded as a point of essential importance, or in danger of a serious attack. The representations of the Light Horse succeeded and nothing more was done to fortify that part of the Platrand.

Thus far, Waggon Hill proper had not been occupied; but before the attack three companies of the 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps, about 150 strong, were placed on it to connect the Waggon Hill West outpost with the main line on Cæsar's Camp. At the same time a few more Light Horsemen reinforced the outpost itself. The Rifles, as we know, built themselves one sangar; but their small numbers prevented their covering much ground and limited the size and strength of their work. It must be remembered that whereas Colonel Knox could afford to build large and massive fortifications because he had the men to fill them, Colonel Hamilton, who had not 1,000 bayonets[1] in all to hold the entire Platrand, was forced to limit his artificial defences. To build more forts than could be held by the available force was simply to provide impregnable positions ready-made for the enemy. When, after the attack, the 2nd Rifle Brigade occupied Waggon Hill they were able to fortify it, not only because they had enough labour but because they could supply the men to hold the works. The gun-pits on Waggon Hill West were, of course, the work of the Engineers and sailors, and owing to the hill's exposure to shell fire had to be completed by night. It will be noticed that this liability to draw fire was also the reason why the Manchester Regiment made no attempt to build redoubts, and contented themselves with rifle pits on their outpost line on Cæsar's Camp.

Still, whatever may have been the case on Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill, the omission to fortify Waggon Hill West must be regarded as an initial blunder. What effect one or two forts on that point would have had upon the fight as it was actually fought is less certain; and in view of the fact that the British were surprised, it was perhaps lucky that none were built. The scene at 3 a.m. seems to have been one of extraordinary confusion; and had the Boers been able to see a definite objective such as a sangar or fort looming in front of them, in all probability they would have made for it and got in. If they had succeeded, the task of

[1] Manchesters, 650; Rifles, 150; Imperial Light Horse, 100; total, 900.

re-capturing the lost works—as was shown by Scott-Turner's desperate assault on the Boer redoubts at Kimberley—would not only have cost many lives, but might not have succeeded. It is true that, on the other flank, the sight of the Manchester forts had an exactly opposite effect; for, when the enemy reached the Eastern Point of Cæsar's Camp and made ready to cross the Plateau to the Northern Crest,[1] the formidable aspect of the works in front caused them to turn back and to attack the rear of the Manchester picquets. But the two cases were absolutely dissimilar. The task of capturing in daylight a row of strongly-built forts with half a mile of open flat to be covered was a very different matter to a rush under cover of darkness at an isolated work at a moment when the first line of the defenders were mingled with the stormers and were being driven back in confusion. The distance, averaging 800 yards, between the outpost line and the main line of defence on Cæsar's Camp, practically ensured to the defenders a breathing space in which to recover from the surprise of the first attack and to make ready to hold the works behind: on Waggon Hill West there was no such interval, and any forts built there, being themselves in the outpost line, would have had to bear the brunt of the first assault. These remarks, however, are only pertinent on the supposition that a surprise of the outpost line was inevitable. Had the troops on Waggon Hill West been warned in time, well-built sangars could not but have added greatly to the defensibility of the ridge.

As regards the relative value of the two main portions of the Platrand, it would seem that the loss of Waggon Hill would not of itself have rendered Ladysmith untenable; nor would it have laid the town open to fire as the loss of Cæsar's Camp would have done. On the other hand, it would probably have enabled the enemy to obtain a lodgment on Cæsar's Camp; and of course the *morale* of the two sides would not have been the same as before its capture.

II.—THE CHARGE OF THE 1ST DEVONSHIRE REGIMENT.

The following account differs in several striking details from that given in the text:—

The last Boer attack on Waggon Point was heralded by a change of wind. Throughout the great storm it had blown with terrific force from north to south, full in the faces of the enemy. Towards five o'clock it suddenly shifted to the opposite quarter, and as if impelled by the tempest the enemy hurled themselves on the half-blinded defenders. The attack was only beaten back with difficulty; and meanwhile on Waggon Hill itself the Boers not only still clung to the rocks on the southern edge, about 100 yards from the rocky knoll which the Light Horse had held throughout the fight and where many men, including Lord Ava, had been shot through the head as they lay, but even made several spirited attempts to advance and improve their position. From the ridge of rocks Colonel Hamilton was resolved to dislodge the enemy before dark, and for some time had awaited with a burning anxiety, deepened by the pressure on

[1] Which on p. 67 we suggested was the proper course.

Waggon Point, the arrival of Major Park's three companies of Devons; for on the hill itself, with the exception of one party of Manchesters, under Captain Menzies, who were too weak to accomplish anything by themselves, there were no troops possessing any longer the necessary cohesion for a charge. The situation was not improving. The crackle of rifles which had never even for a moment ceased during the previous twelve hours now seemed to reach a climax of intensity; and this, mingling with the loud and continuous claps of thunder and with the crash of Boer shells from Middle and Telegraph Hills, imparted to all the feeling that failure or success hung trembling in the balance. It was then that the Devons appeared *from the direction of Cæsar's Camp*,[1] marching along the pathway that ran under the northern edge of the hill behind the positions of the King's Royal Rifles and the Imperial Light Horse.

Colonel Hamilton ran to meet them, halted them and with Major Park crept forwards to the rocks where Ava had been killed and from which a good view of the Boer position could be obtained. Here he pointed out the Boer position and explained to the commanding officer of the Devonshire Regiment that he wanted the companies to steal quietly up to these rocks and then to charge across the remaining 100 yards of flat and open ground which separated them from the enemy. Both officers then returned to where the men stood in single rank with their arms at the slope. "As I looked at their faces," says one who was present, "I knew they would not fail." When, however, the signal was given by Park to the men to move off the bugler, owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding, sounded the charge;[2] and instead of creeping up in silence, the men ran forward at once with a loud cheer, so that not only did they reach the crest somewhat disordered and winded with a hundred yards rush up the hill, but they also gave the Boers a warning of what was coming. As the line of flashing bayonets rose over the edge of the plateau the Mausers spoke in one jarring crash and the men topped over like ninepins when a ball is rolled amongst them. As they came abreast of the Imperial Light Horse, they had to wheel considerably to the right in order to make directly for the enemy's position. In carrying out this movement the left pressed in upon the right so that that part of the line was two or three deep; and to avoid further overcrowding Colonel Hamilton, who had followed in their track as far as the rocks, stopped Menzies' company of Manchesters who were moving on their left and let the Devonshire men go on alone in the teeth of the fire. Suddenly there sounded to the anxious listeners behind the rocks now beaten into dust and splinters by the hail of bullets, the rattle of a new fusillade which did not come from the enemy. Some forty yards in front the right of the Devons had thrown themselves down to fire, while the left which was somewhat behind rushed on to complete its wheel. It was an agonising moment for the watchers in rear, for the failure of the earlier attacks had always been due to the same fatal check and loss of impetus; and all knew that when once an attack ceased to advance its collapse was only too probable. Was the last British reserve to fail? The question did

[1] The direction of the tail of the arrow in the map is therefore wrong.

[2] Speech made at Bristol by Sir Ian Hamilton.

not wait long for its answer. As the left dashed into line the men on the right rose together; and with a great shout the whole flung themselves upon and across the rocks so long and stubbornly held by the enemy.

In conclusion, Sir Ian Hamilton's remarks on the decisive factor in the day's fighting are worth noting. Speaking of the advantages of the assailant in modern war, he says:—"I, personally, have never seen a determined and skilfully led attack fail when directed against a passive defence. . . . The siege of Ladysmith can hardly be quoted to the contrary, for it was only by successive determined counter attacks that Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill were retained on the 6th January.[1] I think that it [the Boer attack] would probably have succeeded if strong counter attacks had not been made.[2] . . . They had twice knocked us clean off it [Waggon Point]. . . . Twice there was not a British soldier alive and unwounded on the top."[3]

APPENDIX E

THE 1ST CONTINGENT OF THE IMPERIAL YEOMANRY

SEVERAL high authorities, while bearing witness to the good work done by the 1st contingent of Imperial Yeomanry, unite in emphasising the danger "of knocking men into shape in face of the enemy,"[4] and largely ascribe the fine performance of the force, when called upon to do serious work, to the months which were available in England and South Africa, for preliminary training. Colonel Lucas[5] speaks of the value of the initial march through Cape Colony, and holds that one of the causes of the superiority of the 1st contingent was due to the time spent at the commencement, more or less under fire, without the risk of a severe action; the Boers at that period being a good deal scattered and shaken by the disaster of Paardeberg. In the same way Lord Roberts, while mentioning the 1st contingent as amongst those special corps which could be trusted within a few weeks of formation, says:—"I thought they were excellent after a very short time. Of course, we gave them all the training we could. I kept them in Cape Colony at first and brought them up by degrees. . . . I took care at first that they were only used sparingly, but after a bit they became excellent."[6] Again while he is inclined to question whether the Boers would be less troublesome opponents than regulars for half-trained men to face, he attributes the Lindley and Rhenoster River disasters to the want of training of the troops, and sums up his view by saying that he does not think we could put so large an army into the field again unless the proportion of trained troops were larger.

[1] War Commission, Vol. II., pp. 108–9. [2] Ibid., Question, 13947.
[3] Ibid., Question, 13949. [4] Lord Scarborough's Evidence Question, 7314.
[5] Evidence, Questions 6514, 6731. [6] Ibid., Questions 10234, 10373.

Lord Valentia[1] commenting on the organisation, points out that not only was the regimental system not adhered to in all cases, but that very often regiments which did exist were not formed of the squadrons originally allotted, and were too frequently scraped together to meet a sudden emergency. In such circumstances it is not surprising to find Major W. C. Knight[2] saying that the strength of country or squadron feeling often told against the strength of the regiment as a whole.

We have not been able to discover the exact number of Volunteers who entered the Imperial Yeomanry, but the following figures, showing the proportion in which the different recruiting sources contributed to the Corps of Sharpshooters, may be of interest. It must, however, be remembered that this being an entirely new corps, unbased upon any previous organisation, naturally contained a peculiarly small proportion of old yeomen.

Number selected, 1,205; of these 13 were old yeomen, 607 volunteers, 188 ex-regulars, and 397 civilians.

The extremely heavy wastage in the force during its year of service was due, in Lord Methuen's opinion, to want of stamina in the men; a failing which Major Wyndham Knight[3] attributes to the fact that a number of men had understated their ages, and over-rated their vigour. The result was that large numbers went to hospital, and afterwards were allowed to return home on too slight excuses.[4] The absence of fresh drafts was most keenly felt; by such means the framework of the original force would have been maintained, and a nucleus of seasoned men and officers formed, which would have been of the utmost value to the newcomers. As it was, only a very small proportion of the 1st contingent joined the 2nd. The whole force had to be organised and trained anew; and that, under much more unfavourable circumstances than had obtained in the case of the 1st.[5]

APPENDIX F

EMPLOYMENT OF THE VOLUNTEER FORCE

JUDGING from Sir Howard Vincent's evidence, it appears that while on the one hand too sanguine a view is taken in the text[6] of the capacity of even the best Volunteer battalions, on the other the drawback of mixing the men and officers of different corps is exaggerated. As early as August, 1899, he offered to form a composite battalion made up of men and officers carefully selected from groups of regiments, and he holds the opinion that, although no entire volunteer battalion could be trusted, and from many corps not even one company could have been furnished, this

[1] Evidence, Question 7012. [2] Ibid., Question 7199.
[3] Ibid., Question, Vol. I., p 518. [4] Précis of Lord Methuen's Evidence and Question 14234.
[5] Colonel Lucas, 6605, &c. [6] Chapter VI.

system could have been safely extended to other than London Volunteers.[1] In such a way the Volunteer would have been more easily able to show his peculiar excellences and to develop a true *esprit de corps*, and the stimulated effect on the whole force would have been much greater.[2]

Major-General Mackinnon is strongly opposed to the "service companies" arrangement, on the ground that the connection between many, if not most, Volunteer battalions and their territorial regiments is extremely slight; and quotes the instance of the London Volunteers, who are much more closely connected with the Guards than the Line regiments to which they are, on paper, affiliated. Whether this factor would have operated so powerfully in the case of non-metropolitan corps is questionable; and General Mackinnon probably indicates a more serious line of cleavage when he says that the Volunteer and the Regular represent different elements in the population and do not willingly mix. The social difficulty was not the only one. From a purely military point of view, to make newly arrived Volunteer companies march with smart Regular battalions hardened by months of campaigning was to inflict great hardships upon the former.[3] Mackinnon's description of the first marches of the C.I.V., in spite of a six weeks' spell of hard work on the lines of communication north of the Orange River, is a striking proof of the importance of this last consideration. "They had no idea of marching discipline, they fell out of the ranks and fell in whenever they liked, without asking any leave; and on the first four days of our regular marching I thought the regiment would fall to pieces."[4] Naturally he is strongly in favour of hardening the men before sending them up to the front, a period of training which he considers would be at least as beneficial to the officers as to the men.[5] Such being the case, it is not surprising to learn that Lord Wolseley is unwilling to trust Volunteers outside chosen defensive positions, where they have little marching and manœuvring: and it is evident that when Lord Roberts estimates the value of non-Regular troops by the experience of their officers he practically eliminates the vast majority of Volunteer corps from the roll of effective troops. Indeed, the main argument in favour of the "service companies" is that so few Volunteer officers are employed in proportion to the Regulars that no disadvantage arises from their want of efficiency. All the evidence goes to show that no Volunteers as at present trained in peace could at once in war time take the field as active troops except with the addition of a large number of Regular officers. As with the Imperial Yeomanry, months of training would be necessary before they could be trusted in the field.

But if that time of preparation is possible, as to a large extent was the case in South Africa, the number of Regular officers can be reduced to two or three without the value of the battalion being seriously reduced. In the case of the C.I.V. the results were extraordinarily good. Lord Roberts's and Sir Ian

[1] The C.I.V. were successfully organised on this system, although both *personnel* and equipment suffered through over-haste.

[2] Evidence, Questions 5453, 5461, 5500.

[3] And, it might be added, to handicap the latter.

[4] Ibid., Questions 7404, 7410, 7431, 7542.

[5] Ibid., 7472.

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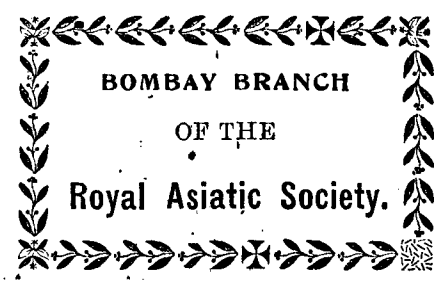

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